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THE WEB DESIGNER'S BIBLE

LAUNCH ISSUE

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DAG'S PLANS FOR A VIRTUAL 3D WORLD

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HOW TO APPEAL TO MOVIE LOVERS

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WAP
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THE FUTURE OF WEB DESIGN...

"WE'VE GOT TO BE ABLE TO STIR THE EMOTIONS AS WELL AS JUST DO THE JOB TECHNICALLY"
- STUART NOLAN, IDTV CONSULTANT, OYSTER PARTNERS

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"WE'RE ALL GOING TO BE WORKING ON TV IN ABOUT TWO YEARS TIME" – Brian Cookman

"WE MAY LOSE THE BROWSER ALTOGETHER! WE'RE CERTAINLY WORKING ON IT" – Gary Mortensen-Barker, BT

"THE MOBILE PHONE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME A TRUST DEVICE" – Bob Brace, VP Nokia

"BY 2010, THE UBIQUITY AND BANDWIDTH OF ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS AND THE STANDARDISATION OF ONLINE PROTOCOLS WILL MAKE THE WEB AS PERVASIVE AS THE TELEPHONE OR TELEVISION" – Amy Jo Kim, Author

"WIRELESS TECHNOLOGIES ARE REALLY GOING TO CHANGE HOW WE THINK ABOUT THE INTERNET" – Bill Gates

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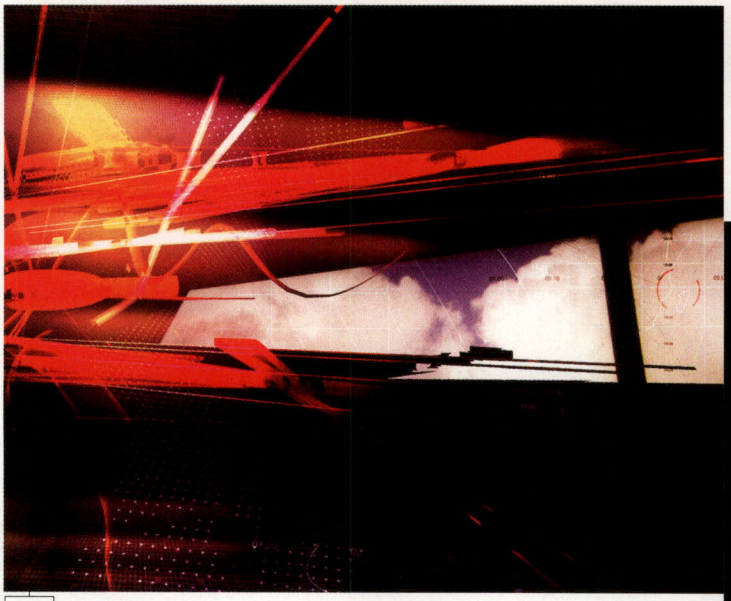
"I ENVISAGE THE CREATION OF THE 'ULTIMATE SEARCH BOT' THAT WILL BE CREATED USING SOPHISTICATED NEURAL NETWORKS AND CONTINUOUS LEARNING FROM THE RESULTS THAT IT RECEIVES FROM THE INTERNET." MARCUS ZILLMAN
"OUR ULTIMATE AMBITION IS TO CREATE VIRTUAL LIVING BREATHING ENTITIES THAT CAN EXIST COMPLETELY ON THEIR OWN"
LAURIE MCCULLOCH, DIGITAL ANIMATIONS GROUP



p50

p90
p90

CONTENTS

JULY 2000_ISSUE 001

departments

YOUR WINDOW ON THE WEB

12 **NEWS**
Discover what Macromedia, Quark and Adobe have up their sleeves

22 **SHOWCASE**
We spotlight the very best sites on the Web today...

26 **TALENT**
...and talk to the people who are taking this industry forward

37 **WIN WEB SOFTWARE**
We've got tons of professional software up for grabs

38 **MADE TO MEASURE**
"Levi's asked us to 'think out of the box' so we did – literally" Lateral talk us through the new Levi's site

44 **HOW THEY DID IT**
Ananova brings a human face to news on the Net. We reveal the secrets behind her polygons

48 **SUBSCRIBE**
...and save money into the bargain

129 **TOP TEN**
The create pivotal top ten

130 **SACRED COWS**
Why broadband is the worst idea ever!

features

THE FUTURE UNVEILED

50 **THE FUTURE FOR WEB ACCESS**
Broadband, WAP and interactive TV – as envisaged by the big boys (and girls) at BT, Nokia and Open

58 **IN FIVE YEARS' TIME**
Five years is a long time in this business – but that didn't stop three luminaries sharing their visions for 2005

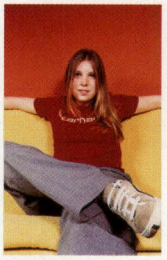
60 **THE STUDIO OF 2005**
We unveil the design studio where you'll be working in the future

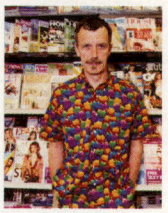
70 **HOW TO...**
As iDTV takes off, we look at what you need to know to design for it

78 **THE BIG ISSUE**
The future for design agencies is up in the air. We debate the issues

100 **HOW TO... APPEAL TO MOVIE LOVERS**
The experts reveal their tricks

112 **WEB OF CHANGE**
69 per cent of designers couldn't live without *Dreamweaver*. Here's why, according to Macromedia





Talent on the Web comes in many forms: Laurie McCulloch tells us his vision of the future (top); Nicky Gibson shares her passion (middle); and Brian Cookman talks about the difficult transition from print to Web (bottom).

people

THE BRAINS BEHIND THE SITES

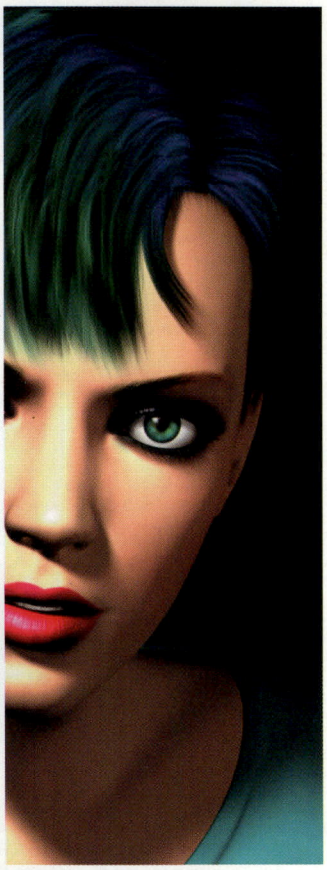
84 **ON THE STREETS**
We talk to the masses at Camden and find out just how little they know about WAP

89 **WHAT THIS SITE NEEDS IS...**
Three industry talents offer their views on what Amazon needs to do to stay ahead of the pack

90 **SITE REVIEWS**
Discover the Websites most loved by four of today's designers

98 **HIT, MISS OR MAYBE**
As sociallifesupport.com teases us with its catchy name, we vote on whether it's likely to be a success

'If I were you mate...' Three industry pundits offer Amazon some advice for the future (top); We review the latest software, including *Zoom Server* (middle); and check out the hottest new hardware to hit the shops, such as this XM1 digital camcorder from Canon (bottom).



44 We get under the skin of Ananova, the world's first digital newscaster.

on the shelves

SOFTWARE AND KIT UNDER SCRUTINY

104 **SOFTWARE DIARY**
As *Illustrator 9* hits the shelves, we give it to two designers to give their verdicts

106 **REVIEWS**
We play with all the latest hardware and software releases and rate them for you

110 **THE SOFTWARE I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT**
One man's passion for Macromedia's little beauty

recruitment

THE SECTION THAT FINDS YOU A JOB

119 **DO IT RIGHT**
How to write a job spec that will put you ahead of the pack

120 **WHAT IS A WEB PRODUCER?**
A week in the life of the fella behind the Audi site

ON THE CD

NESTLING BETWEEN PAGES 34 AND 35 IS THIS ISSUE'S CD, PACKED WITH DEMOS, UTILITIES AND USEFUL CODE

WAP TOOLKIT (FULL PRODUCT)
Develop and test your WAP site now with Nokia's *Toolkit* and Server

FLASH 4 (DEMO)
Put dynamic vector art on your site

DREAMWEAVER 3 (DEMO)
Site authoring tool of the pros

GOLIVE 4 (DEMO)
Try Adobe's Web authoring giant

FIREWORKS 3 (DEMO)
The complete Web graphics solution goes bang

CULT3D 5 (DEMO)
Web 3D package to make you spin

PLUS

DIRECTOR 8 (DEMO)
Test out Macromedia's superb multimedia creation tool

FREEHAND 9 (DEMO)
Giant vector graphics package for you to try out

PHOTOSHOP 5.5 (DEMO)
Image-manipulation at your fingertips with Adobe's worldbeater

PULSE CREATOR 3.5 (DEMO)
Put life in your Website with interactive 3D characters

TOPDOG PAGE ANALYST (DEMO)
Improve your site's listing in the top Internet search engines

SHOCKWAVE 7 (DEMO)
View the latest forms of entertainment on the Web

ACROBAT READER (DEMO)
The most efficient way of sharing electronic info from Adobe

METASTREAM (DEMO)
Get streamed 3D content now, and get it fast

AND MORE...

editro

WHERE IT'S @

I have a dream for the Net that doesn't involve WAP, interactive TV or broadband. I have a dream that's much simpler than that. I dream of the Net delivering sites that are a voyage of discovery. A great site is like a great magazine, armed to the back teeth with personality and character; reaching its intended market with an innovative and thrilling experience. Each one a special occasion.

I've been obsessed with magazines since I was a kid. I don't know any better medium for building a community. Every 28 days a brand new edition appears which sets the agenda, provoking thought and debate and, hopefully, entertaining along the way. I believe that great sites (just like great magazines) become your best friend – you want to listen to what they have to say and spend time in their company. The Internet has the power to build fantastic communities, not only because it's interactive and immediate, but because it knows no social or national boundaries.

But right now we're all staring at a blank wall. There's almost too much opportunity, too many ideas, too much scope. As a designer, every direction you go in is a new direction and it's scary. Casualties like Boo.com and Last Minute don't make the journey any easier. Generations of designers and editorial talent have taken magazines to where they are now. But we are the very first generation of Web designers and we're slowly feeling our way. Web design is the coalface of modern design, where clued-up designers are cutting their teeth, taking things forward, changing all the rules.

That's why I wanted to launch **CRE@TE**ONLINE, to pool those ideas together and inspire other Web designers to build bigger and better sites. We hear that content is king but I believe it's ideas that are the true king, and it's our aim to showcase the best of those ideas and the thinking processes behind them.

I always conceived **CRE@TE**ONLINE as a forum for professional Website designers to exchange ideas. That's why discussion and debate with the experts drives so much of the magazine. After all, these are the people who are redefining our online experience. Their opinions are truly inspirational, not just as ideas that we can translate to our own Websites but also as a springboard from which to think up new approaches and angles to our work.

Our Website (www.createonline.co.uk) is integral to this notion of the magazine as a forum. While each edition of **CRE@TE**ONLINE promotes a certain theme, our Website gives you the chance to look at what we've printed, then throw your own opinions into the mix. Subsequent issues of **CRE@TE**ONLINE then print the very best of these opinions, keeping the debate rolling. Check out the 'Talk' and 'Big Issue' sections of our site and you'll see what I mean. This month's theme – if you hadn't guessed it already – is the future for Web design.

I want to see an Internet that's full of innovation, smart design and new ideas. I see **CRE@TE**ONLINE as a facilitator in this process, driving debate about what constitutes great design and spotlighting sources of inspiration. It's an ambitious aim but I've got a hugely talented team who are fired up and ready to go.

Welcome to **CRE@TE**ONLINE...

Mark Higham
Editor-in-Chief
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Every issue, we employ the best photographers and illustrators in the business...

JAMIE BEEDEN

Every month we use the talents of a different guest photographer to shoot all the issue's images. Jamie worked under *Dazed and Confused*'s photography guru Rankin for two years before embarking on a lucrative freelance career working on the likes of *Time Out*, *The Sunday Times Magazine*, *Select*, *Q* and *Heat*.
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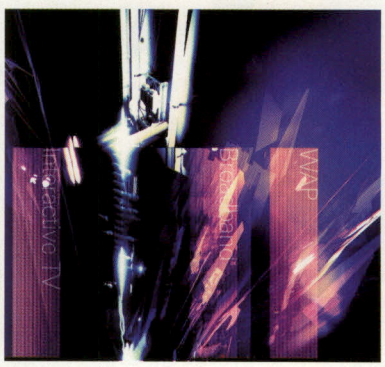

ATTIK

Design house Attik is responsible for this month's intro images and the opener to our Future features. Since its foundation in Huddersfield by James Sommerville and Simon Needham, the company has grown rapidly and now employs 150 people worldwide. The images on pages 2-3 were created at the company's offices in Sydney; pages 4-5 were conceived in London; and pages 50-51 came from Attik's Huddersfield team.
You can contact Attik on 020 7674 3000.

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Future Publishing Ltd, FREEPOST, BS4900, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7B
Existing subscription & back issues availability info: [t] 01458 271 100
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Printed at Cradley Print, UK
Covers printed at Midway Clark Printing, UK
Colour Origination Rival Colour
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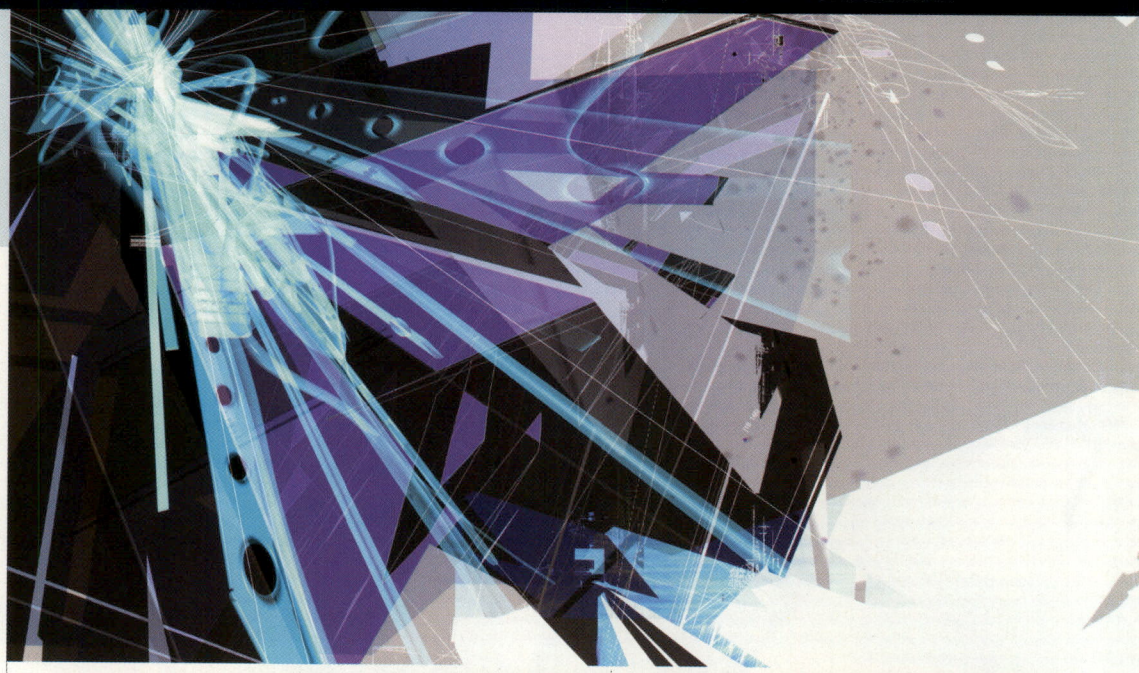
"WHAT WE'RE CALLING OUT FOR ARE TOOLS THAT WILL SAVE US FROM REINVENTING THE WHEEL WITH EVERY PROJECT" GIDEON SUMMERFIELD, CORPORATE STRATEGIST, DESIGNERCITY



THE WEB is different from other media. It's about interactivity and up-to-the-minute information. At the high end, collaboration is key. Dreamers at the front-end design interesting interfaces in *Photoshop*; practitioners in the middle write code and scripts; and the propeller-heads make sure that databases are integrated properly so they can capture data and generate content on-the-fly. A project manager ties the whole thing together. And if you're creating for print, or other interactive media, it gets more complex.

But finally, software heavyweights Adobe, Macromedia and Quark have cottoned on. Their major new releases aren't just about making zingier graphics. Yes, we'll drool at what they serve up in *Flash 5* or *Photoshop 6*, but it's the workflow and back-end tools in *GoLive 5* and *UltraDev* which are news. Both include extra support for working collaboratively. But, more importantly, they make it possible to create database-driven sites, live, within *GoLive* or *Dreamweaver* respectively.

***QuarkXPress 5*'s HTML editor promises to bring the 'create once, use many' working model closer to reality. But it's *avenue.quark* and the Digital Media System (DMS) which are more significant. You'll be able to tag, format and track your media through *Photoshop*, *XPress* and even *Excel* using a combination of the two. You'll be able to purpose content for the Web, print and even WAP using the system.**

These tools will have a massive impact on the way sites are designed. They'll make the job easier and quicker, meaning your development time and cost will be reduced. Their manufacturers' positions in the market spells workflow reform too, not possible with lesser vendors. And while they lack the superficial glamour of, say, the latest graphics package upgrade, their effect on the industry will be more wide ranging. That's news.

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DESIGN DOES DYNAMIC

THERE'S MORE TO WEB DESIGN THAN PRETTY PICTURES. WE LOOK INTO THE FUTURE FOR CREATIVE SOFTWARE AND TAKE A PEEK AT WHAT THE MAJOR PLAYERS HAVE UP THEIR SLEEVES

AS THE Web design market matures, how do you expand your market if you're a market-leading manufacturer of content-creation software? If you're Adobe, Macromedia or Quark, it's all about workflow and databases now.

You could, though, try to muscle in on someone else's territory like Adobe's doing with its new *Flash*-killer *LiveMotion*. The software, announced in March, is aimed at Web designers who want to add rich media to their sites, in the same way they would ordinarily use *Flash*.

THE END IS NIGH

Adobe's intention is clear: it wants designers to create sites which are high-impact and interactive. And indeed, *LiveMotion* has the credentials to do this: it's timeline based, drawing on Adobe's expertise in the video industry with products like *After Effects* and *Premiere*. But even more telling is *LiveMotion's* ability to output SWF files, the format used by *Flash*. This means that end-users will be able to use their *Flash* plug-ins to view *LiveMotion*-created content. It will be integrated tightly with other Adobe image-creation software too – *Photoshop* and *Illustrator*.

A significant development indeed. But professionals in Web design know that the market is moving on. It's no longer simply a case of building snappy, flashy sites.

"I'd expect *LiveMotion* to be powerful," says DesignerCity corporate strategist Gideon Summerfield. "However, this must be more of a tweak than a leap. I can't imagine there's anything it enables us to do that we couldn't do before, given more time. What we're calling out for are tools that will save us from reinventing the wheel with every project."

Companies that have made their names as purveyors of content creation software have heeded the call. Consider Adobe: its 1999 purchase of GoLive's *CyberStudio* is set to imminently yield its fifth version. As well as doing what it already does a little faster and a little flashier, it aims to simplify the creation of dynamic, database-driven Web applications.

To begin with, you'll be able to see application server pages as you develop them in *GoLive 5*. A software development kit targets developers with ambitions to move into other dynamic technology. This will also combine with better site flowcharting and Adobe's workflow enhancement system, WebDAV. This system makes it easier for separate developers to collaborate on large projects.

CIRCULAR CREATION

Macromedia is also sounding off. The company is keen to build upon the continuing popularity of its authoring package, *Dreamweaver*.

"YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE TO BUY AND LEARN A NEW TOOL AND HAVE A SEPARATE WORKFLOW FOR EVERY NEW MEDIUM YOU WANT TO PUBLISH TO" GAVIN DRAKE, QUARK

***LiveMotion's* Timeline demonstrates its integration with the company's video products, but that's only part of the picture for Adobe on the Web.**

ILLUSTRATION: **ATTIK**

Thus, it's promoting what it calls the 'Web Content Lifecycle'. This process has four elements: creation, management, personalisation and analysis. This is set to be encapsulated in its Whirlwind project, which is a complete platform for the originating, managing, verifying and analysing of content for Websites.

A key component of this is *UltraDev*, the natural successor to the company's *Drumbeat* application. *UltraDev* was introduced at April's Internet World show in Los Angeles, and officially announced in Britain on 8 May (see p106 for more).

It will enable you to develop ASPs, Java-application server pages (JSPs) and *ColdFusion*-based Web applications live from a server within the *Dreamweaver* GUI. For designers, this is a promising note.

However, it may be Quark that gains most from the ever-maturing market. Although Quark is adding HTML generators and editing tools to upcoming releases of *QuarkXPress*, its heart lies in what it terms 'media-independent publishing'.

"Media-independent publishing is the idea that you should be able to publish to one medium as easily as another without duplicating your costs," explains Gavin Drake, Quark's European marketing manager. "You shouldn't have to purchase and learn a new tool and have a separate workflow for every new medium you want to publish to."

To this end, it will use its impending Digital Media System (DMS) and its upcoming XML import/export product, *avenue.quark*. DMS will tag assets, including text and graphics with a number of metadata, and by including XML instructions, you'll be able to recall pre-formatted material to go where you want it – paper or computer and eventually wireless devices too.

avenue.quark brings automation to the table too, which is essential for larger facilities.

"You could literally build up an editorial department to try and create and maintain Websites manually, but why would you want to do that?" explains Marek Grabowski, creative director at new media consultancy The Hub. "It's hard enough trying to find personnel to fill the bloody jobs we've got at the moment. So wherever we can, we automate things."

SERIOUS STUFF

Quark's new direction has something for smaller facilities too.

"Even clients whose business is completely online still require printed material as handouts, advertising, packing, CD-ROMs and so on," explains Geoff Cattini, a designer at The Set in London. "With this in mind, we can't justify charging clients double the cost for essentially the same material. As *XPress* is the main tool of the print designer, it makes sense to acquire text and images for printed material first, and then without too much effort, turn it into Web-friendly material."

Time was that it was good enough for a manufacturer to show you whizz-bang capabilities for making snazzy sites. The message was: impress your end users with your HTML code. Now, those same manufacturers are out to impress you. The Web just got serious. ■

SEE THE SITES

If you want to learn more about our interviewees, why not check out their Websites? The relevant addresses are:

www.designercity.com
www.thehub.co.uk
www.theset.co.uk

IF ONLY... WEB DESIGNERS BARE THEIR SOULS AND TELL US WHAT THEY'D LIKE TO SEE FROM SOFTWARE

FINN TAYLOR
Designer,
Liquid Light, Brighton.

"REGARDING *Photoshop*, it would be good if you could organise all your layers in folders. Then if you were designing a Website, you could put it all into folders and label them. At the moment, it all gets a bit unwieldy when you get to 100 layers.

"It would also be a real plus to add frame-by-frame rotoscope repainting, similar to *Commotion*. Then you could open up a *QuickTime* movie and go through a frame-by-frame repaint within *Photoshop*."

What else? "I'd like someone to come up with a server-side scripting capability, in a similar vein to *Drumbeat*. *UltraDev* works with JSP, *ColdFusion* and ASP. It'd be great if someone did that for either PHP or Perl, which are freeware versions.

"And what about putting a GUI to these popular and powerful environments? The majority of Webservers are Apache, running Perl and stuff like that. It would be nice to see someone do a front-end GUI version to Perl, MySQL databases and so on. I think that's a place where the market's wide open at the moment. How about saying: 'Look guys, get on the Open Standards bandwagon. Linux is growing massively. Open Standards are growing, Perl and PHP are open standards. Give that power to people without them needing to have programming knowledge'."

w: **www.liquidlight.co.uk**

KARSTEN SCHMIDT
Senior developer,
Zinc, London.

"I'M NOT a friend of all-in-one software packages really. Experience shows us that software in general has reached a certain level of complexity that is its optimum. By adding even more features and functions, general quality and efficiency goes down; the software gets too hard to maintain.

"In the end, it all comes down to software being a tool to express your ideas. After a while you get used to a particular tool and you become more efficient and faster in using it, so you know the best things it can do.

"Ideally, I'd like something similar to *Flash* with real-time imaging features for bitmaps. This could include stuff like blending, filtering, deforming and so on; plus flexible handling of different media types (such as video), all combined with some powerful programming language.

"But surely the best thing would be if every major application we know today could be used as a module or plug-in within your own software, with your own data structures. For example: you need some imaging features? Et voila – here you have the *Photoshop* module which is seamlessly integrated."

And any thoughts on platform? "Mac would be my personal first choice. I'd like to see more innovative software coming out for Linux, though, to push this platform even more."

w: **www.zinc.co.uk**

FACE TO FACE

HERE'S HOW THE MAIN PACKAGES FROM THE MAJOR PLAYERS COMPARE

DREAMWEAVER ULTRADEV

- Enables Web applications to be created visually
- Reads and writes ASP, JSP and *ColdFusion* mark-up language (CFML)
- Supports servers including Microsoft *IIS*, Allaire *ColdFusion*, IBM *WebSphere*, BEA *WebLogic*, and *Netscape Enterprise Server*
- Replaces *Drumbeat* **UltraDev costs £469. You can upgrade from *Drumbeat* and *Dreamweaver* too.**

w: **www.macromedia.co.uk**

AVENUE.QUARK

- Enables you to tag content with XML for use on a variety of platforms
- Works as Xtensions software, compatible with *QuarkXPress*, and *XPress Passport*
- Connects to *Vignette StoryServer 4*, which makes it easy to upload extracted and tagged material to *StoryServer4*-based systems
- Extensible, so you can build your own connections with third-party applications

***avenue.quark* costs £234.**

w: **www.quark.co.uk**

GOLIVE 5

- Handles code from a variety of sources besides *GoLive*
- Extra support for *QuickTime* objects and *Flash* content
- JavaScript based SDK for extensibility
- Increased integration with *Photoshop* and *Illustrator*, automatically updating native image files
- Extra support for collaborative projects included
- Conceptualising and diagramming functionality
- Integrated reporting function
- Supports SVG, *QuickTime 4*, CSS2, XHTML and *Flash*

***GoLive* is set to cost £234, or £111 for an upgrade.**

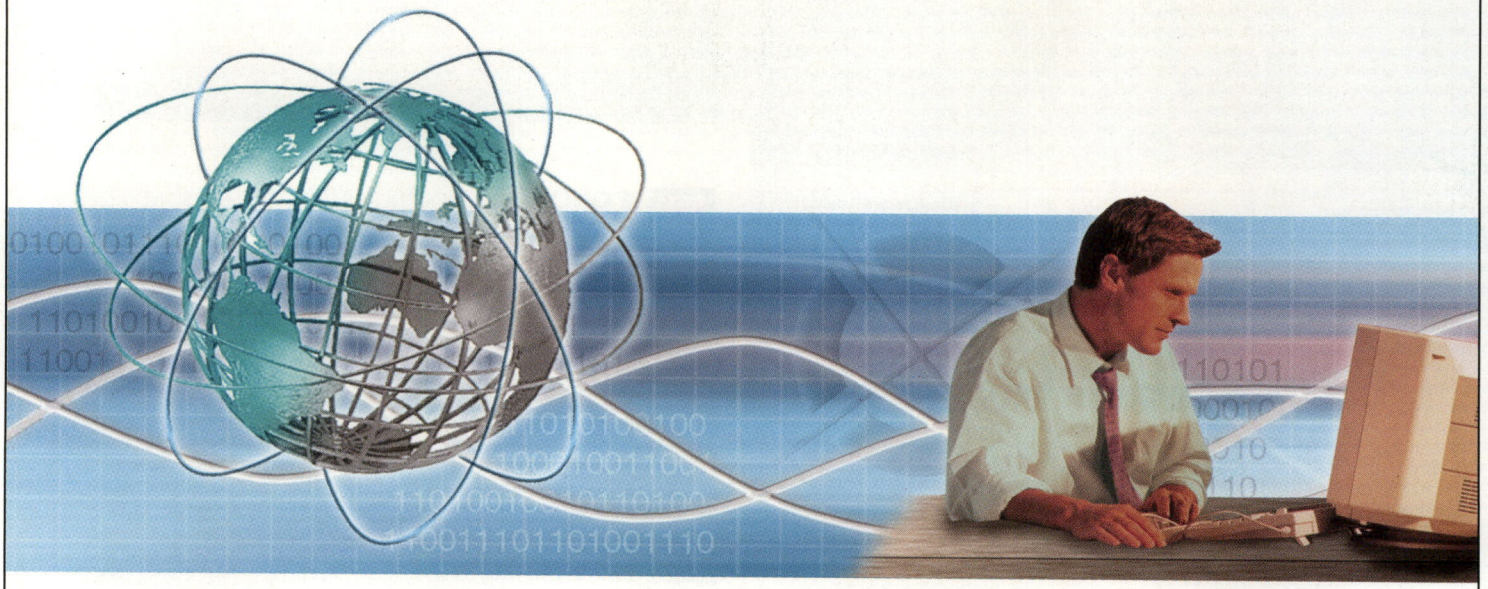
w: **www.adobe.co.uk**

LIVEMOTION 1.0

- Timeline is object-based, meaning that every attribute of every object can be animated independently here
- Auto keyframing and tweening
- Supports WAV, SND AIFF, AU and MP3 sound file formats
- Vector-based drawing tools
- Imports a number of image file formats including GIF, PNG, JPEG, TIFF, EPS, and layer files from *Illustrator* and *Photoshop*
- Exports SWF, GIF, animated GIF, JPEG, PNG, *GoLive* compatible HTML and JavaScript, plus *Photoshop* PSD files.

***LiveMotion* is priced at £224**

w: **www.adobe.co.uk**



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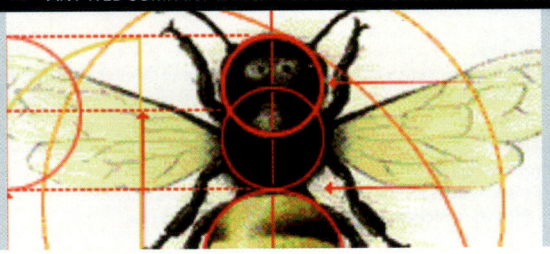
"ANY WEB COMPANY WHICH DESIGNS A WEBSITE FOR THE ADSL USER WILL RESTRICT ITS CLIENTS' POTENTIAL AUDIENCE" IAIN BLENKHORN, APPLE AGENCY



ORGANIC R&D

ORGANIC HAS announced the formation of a worldwide research and development wing that will enable it to experiment with new technology. The new base will open in New York, but is set to work closely with Organic's global-wide offices. Initially, the new lab will focus on wireless technology. ■

w:**www.organic.com**

BT TRUMPETS ADSL

BRITISH TELECOM has announced details of its new high speed Internet access business, scheduled to launch in July.

The new service, called BTopenworld, relies on asynchronous digital subscriber line (ADSL) technology, targeting business and consumers.

BTopenworld's chief operating officer Ben Andradi is excited by the service's possibilities. "The advent of broadband and mobile is creating a second Internet wave. It's altogether faster, more cost effective and compelling." However, Andradi does not believe that Web design is likely to be affected by the increased bandwidth in the short term.

"I don't think that Website design will be directly affected as use of ADSL becomes an option for the end user," said the Apple Agency's Iain Blenkhorn. "I think that any Web company which designs and develops a Website for the ADSL user will in effect restrict its clients' potential audience."

Speaking further on the development, technologist at London's SAS agency, Kelvin Luck says: "I'm quite excited by the advent of broadband – it will enable Web designers to unleash more of their creativity. But I think it's very important for designers and programmers to remember that the majority of users will still be surfing with a 56K modem."

The USB-based ADSL connection is 'always-on', and is capable of downstream access of up to 512Kbps, with upstream access at 256Kbps. That's around ten times faster than the fastest conventional modems of today, and up to eight times faster than ISDN.

BTopenworld has signed a number of content deals. Rich content is expected to be a major part of the service, as demonstrated by partnerships such as Atom films, CNN and Carlton Online. ■

w:**www.btopenworld.com**

DRINK'S ZINC ROLLER

VIRGIN HAS chosen digital agency Zinc as a design partner for the new Virgin Cola Website. Zinc's various design elements will include Rollercola Girl, who will have a circle of friends and a "cheeky and ballsy" personality. Remember, you heard it here first.

Virgin Cola's head of marketing, Alyson Lilley, believes: "Zinc and Virgin Cola will take Virgin Cola's Website to new heights." ■

w: **www.zinc.co.uk**

CLIENTS FROM HELL CLIENTS CAN BE GREAT: THEY PAY YOUR BILLS AND TELL YOU THAT YOU'VE DONE A GOOD JOB. BUT SOMETIMES...

EVERY MONTH, a mystery designer reveals all about a client from hell...

"We had a client who was great, but was being advised by a US management consultancy who knew nothing about Web design. We had our original brief, which we had nearly completed, and we were on schedule. Then our key contact at the client went on holiday.

"The consultancy decided to change one thing after another, but hardly ever came round to see us – it only consulted us by email. Then it decided to get rid of the icon that's central to the brand. So we had to get new art commissioned. Finally it came back after we'd done all the work and wanted that changed too. It'd seen boo.com and wanted us to do the site like that, after we'd spent months on the other concept, and with weeks to go to launch.

"When our client contact came back, it had the sense to junk the consultancy and work properly with us. If we'd had a chance to integrate the stuff we came up with from the beginning into the site, we wouldn't have had anything like the frantic process we wound up with."

NOTABLE QUOTABLES

Developer: "From experience we think there are too many options..."

IT Manager: "No, we want a 25-speed gearstick." Quite. ■

FILEMAKER'S NEW LINE-UP

FILEMAKER INC has announced v5 of its heavyweight database tools. The line includes *FileMaker Pro 5* in both Standard and Unlimited forms, *FileMaker Server 5*, and the *FileMaker Box Set*. The update retains the company's support for XML and introduces a number of design tools.

***FileMaker Developer 5* enables you to create *FileMaker*-based standalone applications. It also fully supports XML as well as database developer standards such as ODBC and JDBC.**

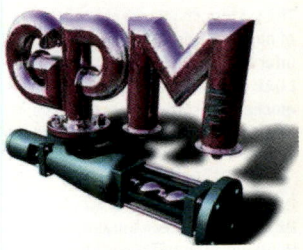
For example, *FileMaker* includes a Kiosk mode, which facilitates the creation of touchscreen-based front-ends to *FileMaker* databases. You can use *FileMaker Developer 5* to create front-end applications in Java too, using the software's JDBC support. What's more, all programs created in *Developer* are royalty-free, and do not require the end user to own or run a copy of *FileMaker Pro*.

Companies with 50 or more employees will benefit from the *FileMaker Box Set*'s licencing structure. One licence will cover either the total amount of computers on-site, or the number of employees – whichever number is smallest.

The *Box Set* includes a complete site licence for *FileMaker Pro 5* and *Pro 5 Unlimited*, the company's database software for Internet and intranet applications. The offer also covers students at colleges and universities that purchase the *Box Set*.

"Our users now have unprecedented breakthrough power and performance in one affordable software solution," says company president Dominique Goupil. ■

w: **www.filemaker.co.uk**



WEB GOES 3D

C-3D Digital Inc, the online trading name of Chequemate International Inc, reported massive access to its newly launched 3D.com virtual reality portal. The portal went live on 10 May, and site visits are 1000 per cent above those expected. Registered users can get a free download of *Strata 3D*. ■

w: **www.3d.com**

"INNOVATIVE WORK IS STARTING TO APPEAR IN SOME OF THE MORE TRADITIONAL MARKET SECTORS" SUE THEXTON, BAFTA INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT COMMITTEE

FAST FOOD

WIRELESS USERS will no longer have to wait for a table, thanks to lastminute.com's launch of the first commercial WAP restaurant booking service in the UK. After registering on the site, you'll be able to make reservations at more than 200 selected restaurants. The service can be accessed on the BT Cellnet and Orange WAP portals and from Last Minute.
w: **mobile.lastminute.com/wap**

BSI BOWS TO PROGRESS

MAJOR TECHNICAL advances in digital product definition and computer-generated 3D modelling have forced the British Standards Institution (BSI) to issue a new specification document for graphic and technical designers. The BS8888 will replace the BS308 series of standards on its publication in July.
w: **www.bsi.org.uk**

DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

VSOFT LTD, the digital video distribution and management software company, has announced the latest version of *VideoClick*. *VideoClick 2.5* now boasts cross-platform compatibility and is scalable for any bandwidth access. The software provides both single and networked users with on-demand, scheduled and multi-cast viewing of high quality videos.
w: **www.vsoft.com**

INSTANT ACCESS

WEB OPERATORS can now improve their database performance with the release of Bluetail's Directory Robustifier. The system enables rapid access of name, IP address and password information on different DNS and LDAP databases, resulting in quicker translation from the page requested to its numerical code.
w: **www.bluetail.com**

NET ME ENTERTAIN YOU

DETAILS HAVE been announced for the Hollywood NetAward show, aimed at the promotion of excellence in the field of Internet entertainment. Categories will include Best Animation site, Best Celebrity Site and Best Independent Music Site. The ceremony takes place on 2 August and opens the fourth annual Hollywood Film Festival. ■
w: **www.netawards.com**

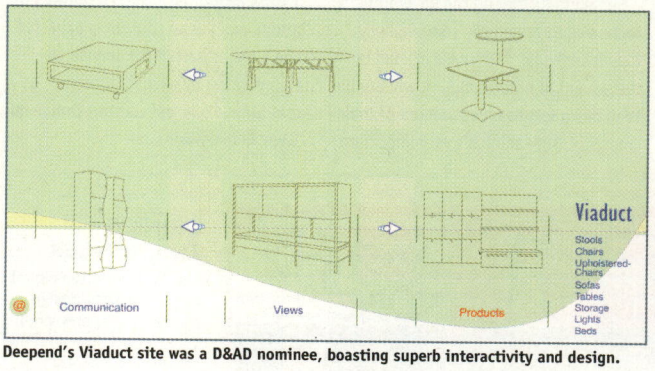
FUTURE TRAILBLAZES WEB AWARD SHOW

FUTURE PUBLISHING, the largest publisher of Internet magazines in the UK has announced it will host The Future UK Internet Awards 2000.

A panel of experts, including members from Future's teams of Internet journalists, will judge nominees in 17 categories such as Best Entertainment Site, Best MP3 Site, Best WAP-enabled Site and Web Innovation of the Year. An award will also be given to the Best Web Design Agency.

The award nominations will be taken online, from Future's readership of over one million, and through Websites that take 800,000 impressions per month. The ceremony will take place at the National History museum on Thursday 28 September 2000. ■
w: **www.uknetawards.co.uk**
w: **www.futurenet.com**

Deepend's Design Museum Website took a Silver award at the D&AD awards ceremony.



Deepend's Viaduct site was a D&AD nominee, boasting superb interactivity and design.

MOULD BREAKER

BUSINESS-TO-business e-commerce is boring, right? Wrong. In fact, Deepend's design for Viaduct is an impressive demonstration of how business-to-business sites can avoid being work-a-day, through the use of compelling design. It was even nominated for a silver award at this year's D&AD award show, held on 24 May at London's Olympia.

Altogether, 17,823 items were entered into the competition. Four Websites, two online ad campaigns and an online game were nominated for Silver awards. Ultimately there were 40 Silver Awards, and 4 Golds handed out. Web-wise it was the Design Museum, also by Deepend, and Aka Pizazz Bird Game online ad campaign that shone through.

However, we believe that B2B can be interesting too. Viaduct sources furnishings for architects to fit its modern designs. The site's fluid *Flash* interface shows just how interesting it can be to do business on the Web. ■
w: **www.viaduct.co.uk**
w: **www.designmuseum.org**
w: **www.dand.org**

NEW GONGS FROM BAFTA

THE BRITISH Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) has revealed a new selection of genre and craft categories for this year's Interactive Entertainment Awards, in an effort to keep up with the mutating nature of the entertainment industry.

Awards will be presented in 21 different categories, and are now set to include Interactive Arts, Music, Technical Innovation and Enhancement of Linear Media. BAFTA Interactive was formed in 1998 to nurture and reward talent in the British interactive industry. Since then the number of award categories have almost doubled. Sue Thexton, Chair of the BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Committee and vice president of Macromedia Europe, believes that a combination of technical advances and industry migration has caused the expansion.

Sue says: "As the interactive industry matures, innovative work is starting to appear in some of the more traditional market sectors. Categories like 'The Enhancement of Linear Media' are a direct result of this."

A broader selection of categories promises to make this year's awards the most comprehensive yet. Professor Malcolm Garrett, Chair of The Interface Design Award and design director at AMX Studios, anticipates an increase in quality.

"There's a strong sense of confidence among committee members who've seen the awards grow in stature and assurance year on year," he says.

The ceremony is set for 26 October 2000 at The Royal Lancaster Hotel, London. You can submit award entries to Dan Boothby, BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Co-ordinator. ■
e: **dboothby@bafta.org**
w: **www.bafta.org**

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- Red Hat Operating System
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from RapidSite

"WE DIDN'T WANT THE DESIGN TO GET IN THE WAY OF THE CONTENT" HAHA BONK AND EMPTY SPACE CREATIVE DIRECTOR MIKE BENNETT

THE LETTER OF THE LAW

WHEN YOU'RE DESIGNING A SITE FOR A CLIENT, MAKE SURE TO LEAVE SOME ROOM FOR THE LAW, ADVISES ROBERT WEGENEK

UNTIL RECENTLY, the Internet was perceived as being free of legal constraint – a fact that most lawyers found unsatisfactory.

In fact, there has always been legal issues regarding the Web. In 1997, Virgin Atlantic Airways was fined for its misleading advertising concerning fares. Regardless of where the site was hosted, it targeted US consumers, which meant that US authorities seized jurisdiction.

If you're responsible for Website design, or are involved in producing content on the Internet, consider it sensible practice to clarify where the site is hosted and with which legal jurisdiction it complies. Always state that accessing the site is subject to acceptance of certain terms.

For e-commerce sites, it's important to clarify how contracts are formed. For example, when Argos made the fatal mistake of pricing televisions at £2.99 rather than at £299.99 two years ago, the company faced considerable costs. The problem could have been avoided with a simple statement clarifying that orders placed online were subject to availability and to final acceptance by the owner of the site.

How this practice is implemented is a matter of opinion. For example, American Websites tend to place the 'legals' prominently. In the UK, we tend to hide terms and conditions behind an icon, requiring the visitor to confirm acceptance by proceeding into the rest of the site. Either solution is acceptable.

However, as business-to-business e-commerce grows, there'll be more online purchases of sufficient value over which to litigate. Precedents will be set, and Internet law will become more established. As this develops, it's better to keep out of trouble by placing legal information on your site.

Legal disclaimers should be visible. By taking such precautions, it will be other sites that will get into legal difficulties. And it will be you and your clients' good names that will remain untarnished. ■

Robert Wegenek is a partner and head of New Media in the London office of Edge Ellison solicitors.
e: **robert.wegenek@edge.co.uk**

CAROLINE SOAPS UP LIFE ONLINE

YOU MAY WONDER WHAT'S REAL AND WHAT'S FICTION AS XPT BRINGS SERIAL TO FREESERVE

HOW DO do you create a soap opera online? XPT's *Online Caroline* may provide the template. The site is a mock Webcam placed in the flat of fictitious character Caroline.

You watch her story as a series of continuously updating images, as well as interacting with other aspects of her life, such as reading her diary or listening to her answerphone messages. You can even vote on the outcome of certain scenes.

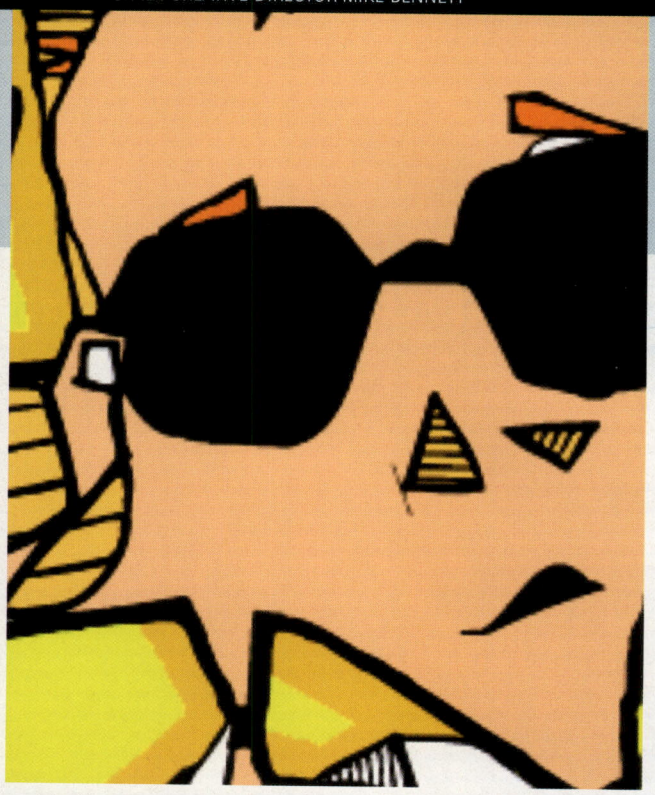
The site boasts around 20,000 registered visitors and attracts around 1000 new registrations per day. ISP Freeserve likes these statistics: it's just invested 19.5 per cent stake in XPT.

In reality, *Online Caroline* is a story shot on DV – 60 minutes of viewing broken into three-minute segments. An automated database tracks your progress through the story, and generates pre-scripted daily emails from Caroline concerning the last episode viewed, and your activity on the site. It's this feature which makes the narrative form unique to the Web.

"It's not an interactive story in the sense you can affect the outcome," says Rob Bevan, co-founder of XPT. "I'd say that it's more of a linear drama," he adds. ■

w: www.onlinecaroline.com

It's not real, honest. But online Caroline's format may be the template from which other Web soaps are drawn.



FUNNY HA HA

EMPTY SPACE DEFINES THE FUTURE OF ONLINE COMEDY

WHAT HAPPENS when two friends wandering through the park find an abandoned light sabre under a tree? This is just one of the queries investigated by HaHa Bonk, a new comedy brand set up by Empty Space, and a fresh digital entertainment company located in central London.

Empty Space, part of The Deep Group family of companies which includes Deepend, intends the HaHa Bonk site to ultimately become a showcase for new and existing British comedy talent. The Website is the brand's first manifestation and is set to launch on other media, including radio and television.

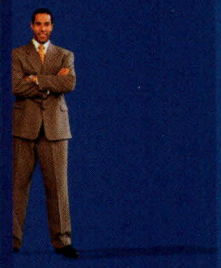
The site treats you to a series of short films and animations. You take a look, then cast your vote on content, sending your preference to a database which rearranges the interface depending on that items' popularity.

Content comes from scouts trawling the country's live comedy scene and through script and video submissions. Comedians have been approached to do voiceovers, and *Flash* animations are sprinkled into the mix too.

The site and the facility are the brainchild of Arvind Ethan David and Mike Bennett. According to Bennett, HaHa Bonk is the answer to a question the co-founders were attempting to answer in late 1999: "How do you create something that is as rich as a book and as compelling as a videogame?"

He continues: "From a design perspective, the whole idea was to create a very strong brand – almost a sports brand in its attitude. Very youth-oriented and very dynamic. But we didn't want the design to get in the way of the content, that's the primary thing. We wanted to create Web-specific content, as opposed to taking television and trying to use it on the Web." If you're in need of a giggle, check it out. ■

w: **www.hahabonk.com**



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- 5 email forwarding options
- FTP support
- FrontPage extensions
- Page counter script
- Form-to-email script
- MKStats for analyzing web usage.

Yearly fee: £119.95 + VAT

Designer Plan

- 20mb disk space
- 10 POP3 mailboxes
- 20 email forwarding options
- 20 email autoresponders
- 2000mb/month data transfer
- Form-to-email template generator
- Your own cgi directory
- Perl script checker
- Free self installing scripts

Monthly: 17.95 +VAT
Set-up: 19.95 + VAT

Professional Plan & Actinic Catalog

- 50mb disk space
- 10 POP3 mailboxes
- 20 email forwarding options
- 20 email autoresponders
- 4000mb/month data transfer
- Form-to-email template generator
- Your own cgi directory
- Perl script checker
- Free self installing scripts
- Anonymous ftp support
- Volano chat room and Excite search engine
- SSL secure server access
- Actinic Catalog-create a powerful online store quickly and easily.

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"BOO WENT INTO RECEIVERSHIP BECAUSE OF POOR BUSINESS STRATEGY RATHER THAN BAD DESIGN" STEVEN FORSTER, DESIGN NET

DESIGNER DIARY

WHAT'S ON IN THE UK

19 JUNE – 23 JUNE
Application Development 2000
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London.
Email: enquiries@sigs.com
Technical programme, vendor exhibition, workshops and product demos for Java and Object.

22 JUNE – 23 JUNE
IPv6,
Millennium Brittania Hotel, London.
Phone: 020 7629 9400
An update on requirements for the transition to IPv6.

22 JUNE – 23 JUNE
eTail 2000,
Cumberland Hotel, London.
Phone: 020 7691 3253
Presentations from Durlacher, Unilever and Boo.com on issues surrounding online retailing.

03 JULY – 04 JULY
T-Commerce World 2000,
The Langham Hotel, London.
Phone: 020 7827 5984
Conference on the future of Interactive TV.

12 JULY – 13 JULY
Online TV, The Hatton, London,
Phone: 020 7827 6000
Program still in development.

WHAT'S ON IN THE US

19 JUNE – 23 JUNE
Macromedia Web World,
Washington State Trade and Convention Centre, Seattle.
Phone: +001 206 285 0305
Addresses the full spectrum of Macromedia Web tools and solutions. Conferences on *Dreamweaver*, *Shockwave*, *Fireworks* and *Flash*.

17 JULY – 21 JULY
Webdesign World,
The Westin Hotel, Seattle.
www.thunderlizard.com/wworld.html
Phone: +001 206 285 0305
Conference focusing on browser compatibility issues, the newest HTML additions and advanced forms of Web interactivity.

17 JULY– 21 JULY
JavaScript Conference,
The Westin Hotel, Seattle.
Phone: +001 206 285 0305
US industry gurus present the nuts and bolts of JavaScript. ■

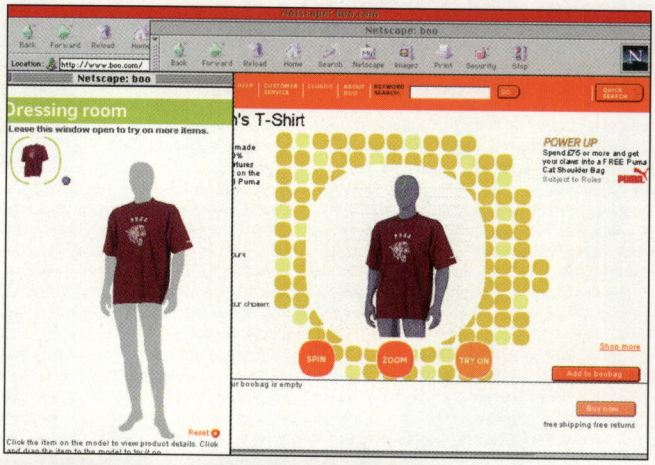
MAYA HITS THE MAC

Alias|Wavefront announced to delegates at Apple's Worldwide Developers' Conference in San Jose, California, that v3 of its flagship package, *Maya*, will support OS X when it's released next year.

Both Alias|Wavefront and Apple have been inundated with requests for a Mac version of the powerful 3D software, previously only available for SGI's IRIX and Windows NT operating systems.

***Maya* is used to create photo-realistic CG animated images. The move to the Mac OS is a huge boost for Apple, as the company has suffered from a lack of support from 3D software companies in the past. OS X's robust and open architecture combined with rapid take-up of G4s spurred Alias|Wavefront's decision.**

"There are over one million G4s in the marketplace, and the majority are at professional graphic houses. The market is a good opportunity for us," said Richard Kerris, director of *Maya* technologies. ■
w: **www.aliaswavefront.com**



BOO.GONE

TOO MUCH, TOO SOON? THE DEMISE OF BOO.COM

WHEN BOO.COM slipped into receivership on 18 May, the forecasts were not good. Europe's highest profile Internet start-up had spent all but £350,000 of the £90m it had raised since early last year, and analysts were speculating on which company would be the next to topple off the edge. Boo, they failed to realise, was a specific case with a unique history.

The company had been plagued from the outset by technical problems, personal difficulties and an extremely negative press. Boo's site, designed by Organic, was initially unavailable to Mac users, took an age to load, and used *Flash* at a time when few members of the public were downloading the plug-in.

"Boo went into receivership because of poor business strategy rather than bad design," says Steven Forster, managing director of Design Net. "The company raised and spent millions of pounds without establishing any solid structure or foundation."

Despite notorious technical difficulties and slow loading times, Boo's site still received wide critical acclaim. Visitors to the site could view detailed 3D images of items that they could rotate or magnify, and they also had the option of dressing a mannequin in clothes they were interested in buying.

Features like these made for a great-looking site, but when the average time to purchase a product was 30 minutes, people soon lost interest. William Cawley, creative director at Blueberry net, sees this as a fundamental flaw in the site's design.

"The navigation was confusing and unintuitive, which is a great shame," he says. "There's some clever stuff there by some very clever people, but it was just too over ambitious."

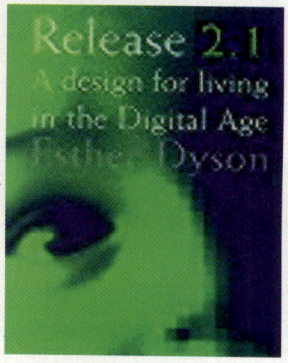
Rather than the first in a long line of failed Web start-ups, Boo.com is likely to serve as a valuable warning to other Web designers. Steven Forster believes that predictions of an e-commerce crash will prove unfounded. "The Web is still highly lucrative. Just not for Boo." ■

BOOKMARKS

LITERARY LINKS

COMMUNITY BUILDING ON THE WEB
Amy Jo Kim, Peachpit £22.99
How do you build an effective and popular Website? If Amy Jo Kim is correct, the secret lies in the ability to foster a sense of community around your content and design. Her book is a practical guide that's full of examples. She makes a lot of good points: read it yourself and find out more.

NEUROMANCER
William Gibson, HarperCollins, £6.99
The first Cyberpunk book of our time. A cowboy called Case double-crosses some mighty powerful people and finds he must take a trip to The Matrix to find a cure. Gibson's 1984 book inspired a slew of techno-fiction and even coined the term 'Cyberspace'.



RELEASE 2.1
Esther Dyson, Penguin £6.99
It's getting on a bit now, but this updated paperback edition of Dyson's earlier *Release 2.0* is still an influential book. It focuses on the social and moral issues facing consumers and Web professionals alike, and sketches out a characterful vision of how the Internet may develop in the future. A valuable read for anyone working on the Web, in whatever role. ■

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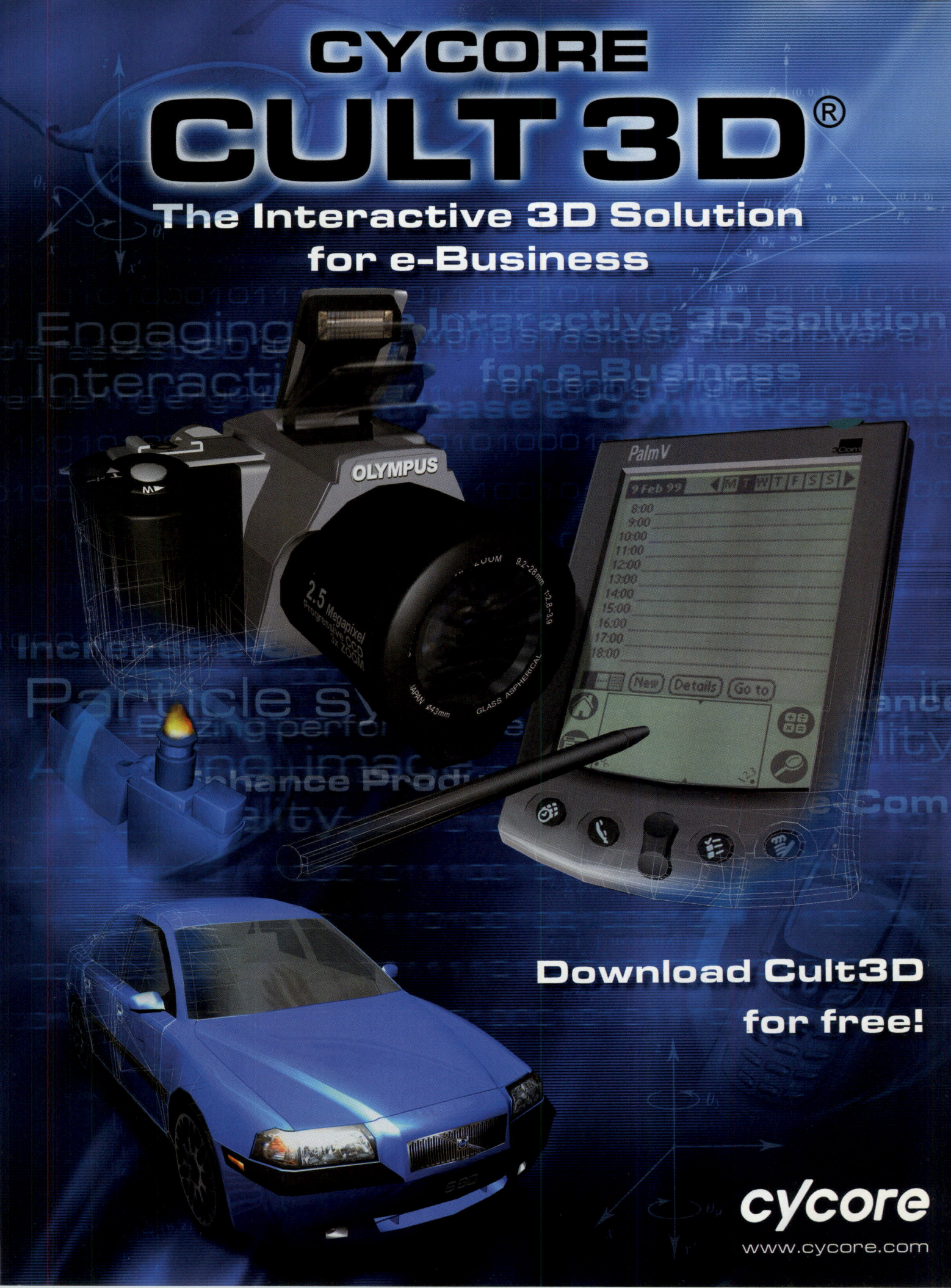

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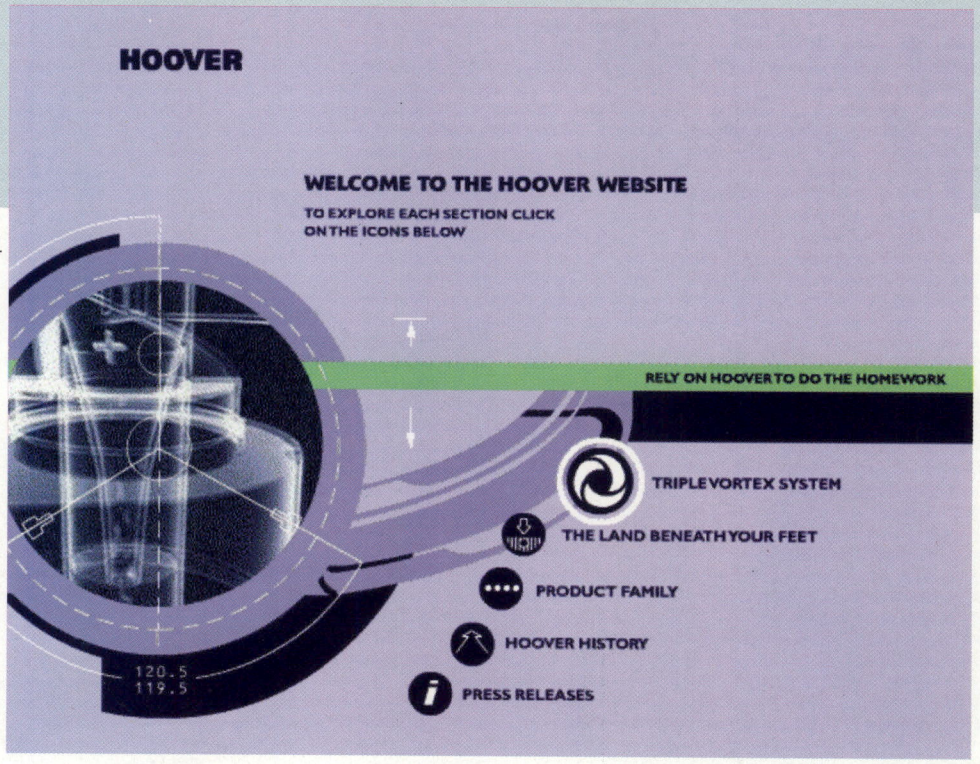
showcase

PREPARE TO BE IMPRESSED AS WE CAST AN EYE OVER 16 OF THE VERY BEST SITES TO EMERGE FROM THE WORLD'S HOTTEST WEB DESIGNERS...

1



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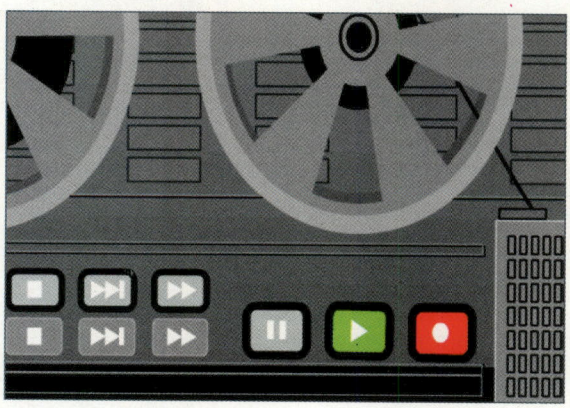

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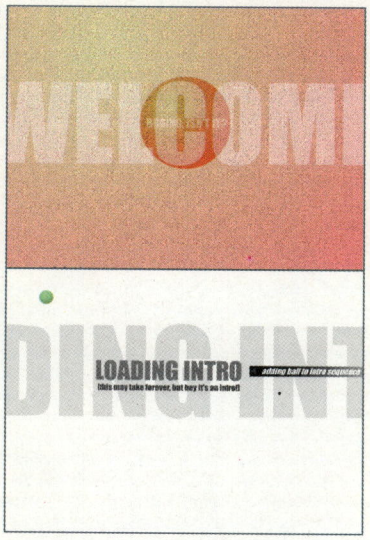

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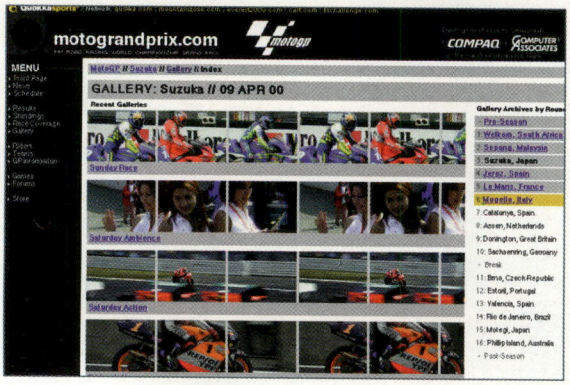


1 THE SITE THAT SUCKS

www.hoover.co.uk by Deepend (www.deepend.co.uk)

The Hoover Website is surprisingly entertaining for a company synonymous with sucking up fluff. Designed in *Flash* by Deepend, it offers detailed and interactive product information, employing rollovers and timelines in an effort to familiarise users with the finer points of the 'triple vortex system'.

Even if you're not interested in buying from the site, you should find time for 'The Land Beneath Your Feet', an interesting, if disturbing, section that shows the flora and fauna of your carpet, from visible pet hair through to mould spores magnified by 1000 times. Don't look at the one about flakes of dead skin just before dinner though.

2 FIFTEEN MINUTES OF FAME

www.getoutthere.bt.com by SAS Design (www.sasdesign.co.uk)

Closet Claptons and promising Peckenpahs should check out BT's GetOutThere. Designed by SAS Design, the site is an initiative dedicated to showcasing unsigned film and music talent on the Web. Budding artists can upload tracks and download industry standard music tools. Film buffs can upload their films and animations. Entries are judged by industry professionals such as Goldie and Kevin McDonald, with winners going on to mix sessions with Tall Paul or study film direction at UCLA.

3 SKIP THE SITE FANTASTIC

www.skipintro.com by an anonymous designer

Skipintro.com is a Website with a message. It's a personal project that makes you wait ages for the loading sequence, purely to prove that you shouldn't have to wait ages for the loading sequence. The interesting *Flash* intro does its best to show that if an introduction doesn't get straight to the point, then it's probably going to get skipped. Oddly though, the rest of the site is ultimately a noticeboard, simple and basic. However, taken collectively it serves as a good lesson in vector graphics and HTMLs.

4 ONLINE YER BIKE

www.motograndprix.com by Quokka inhouse (www.quokka.com)

Motograndprix is the latest sports site to undergo the Quokka treatment. Quokka designed and developed the site itself using *Quokka Sports Immersion (QSI)*. This is a form of entertainment that mixes first-hand reports from the competitors with audio and video footage plus expert commentary to provide in-depth coverage of major competitions. Quokka employs a variety of technology, including *RealPlayer, QuickTime, Flash* and *Shockwave* to present its live coverage of events, highlights and interviews.

5 WINTER WARMER
www.fatface.co.uk by Blueberry.net (www.blueberry.net)
The Fat Face Website was offline for a week in May to enable Blueberry.net to redesign it as part of an ongoing program of site refinements and redevelopments. A different look was needed to promote and sell a new season of clothing online, and the redesign utilises elements of *Intershop 4* to increase the speed and ease of navigation. Fat Face also employs Blueberry's 'As if by Magic' e-commerce solution for the overall running of the site. Blending the strengths of a consortium of industry partners, the end result you get is a complete e-commerce strategy from planning and design, through to product renumeration.

6 VEGAMITEY BIG ADVENTURE
www.emirateschallenge.com by Traffic Interactive (www.traffic.co.uk)
The chance to surf on Bondi beach and jetski past Sydney Opera House in a bid to win £12,000 is what's on offer at the Emirates Sydney Challenge site. Designed by digital marketing group Traffic Interactive to celebrate the launch of Emirates Airlines' Sydney flight route, the site gives four people the opportunity to win an adventure holiday to Australia. Interactive banner ads and a *Flash* intro film are part of the plan to target a younger audience. Traffic Interactive is responsible for designing and developing the content of the site, as well as planning and buying the marketing campaign.

7 TOMORROW'S INTERNET
www.twle.co.uk by I-D Media (www.i-dmedia.com)
Designed by I-D Media, creators of sites for Sony, Swatch and *Wallpaper**, the Tomorrow's World Live site will run in conjunction with the Tomorrow's World 2000 Live Event at Earl's Court from 28 June-2 July. After a brief *Flash* intro, you're presented with a compact and easy to navigate site that provides information on the show's features, including Planet Internet. By incorporating Planet Internet with Yell.com, Tomorrow's World Live has very cleverly created the UK's first Internet exhibition for consumers.

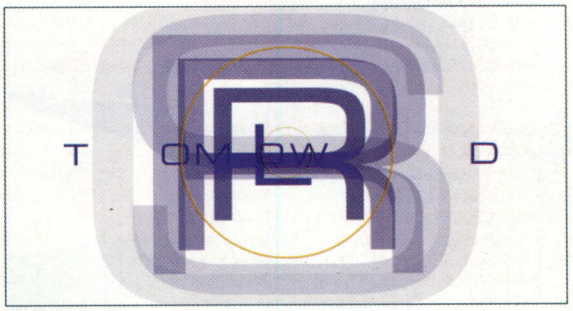
8 DESIGNING FOR ENGER-LAND
www.backthebid.com by Razorfish (www.razorfish.com)
Backthebid, created by Razorfish, gives you the chance to help bring the 2006 World Cup home to England. Following a *Flash* intro, and to the accompaniment of a catchy tune, you can register your support of the Football Association's official bid. The site features pull-down pictures of the team, a countdown in days and hours until FIFA's decision as to who will be the host, plus a voting form. Backthebid is backed by the FA and is produced in conjunction with Umbro.com ➤

5

6

you'd rather be anywhere else...
abseil in the blue mountains
climb the harbour bridge
jetski past the opera house
raft the white waters of penrith

7



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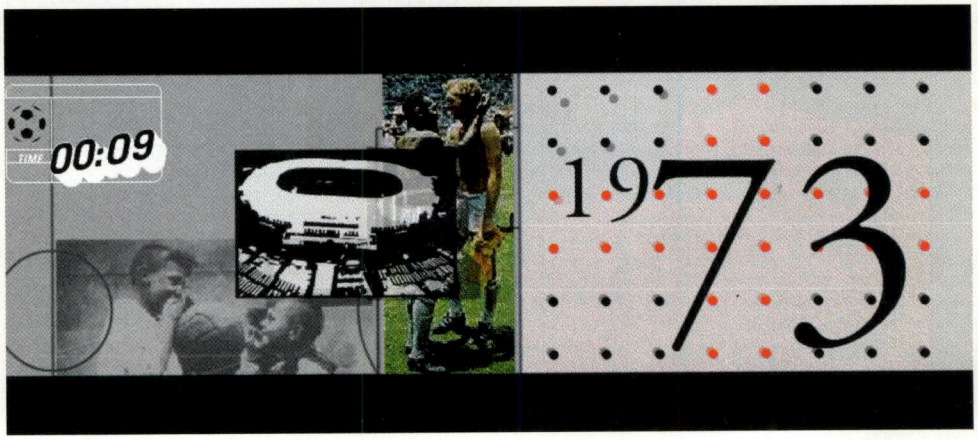
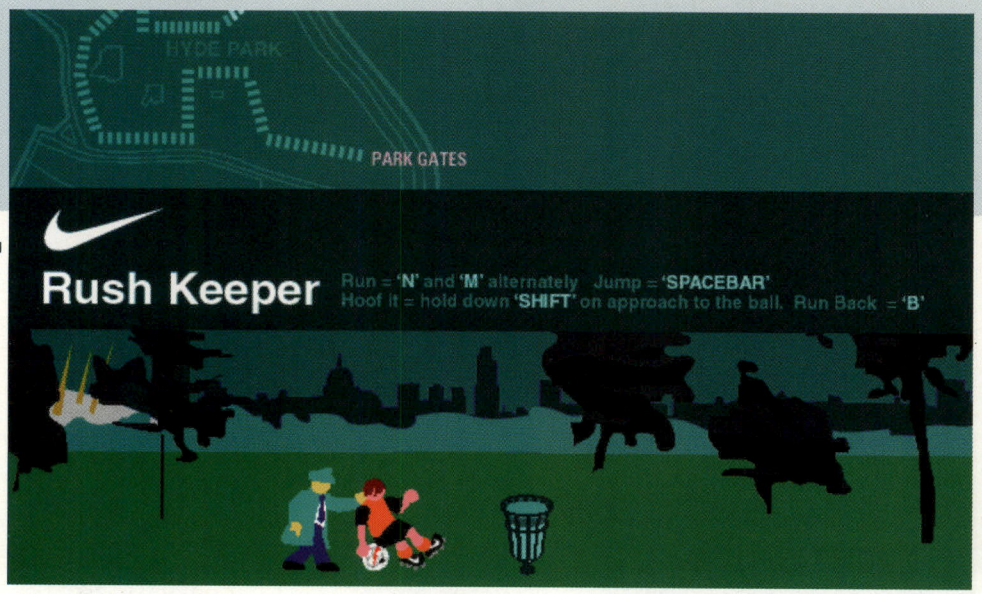


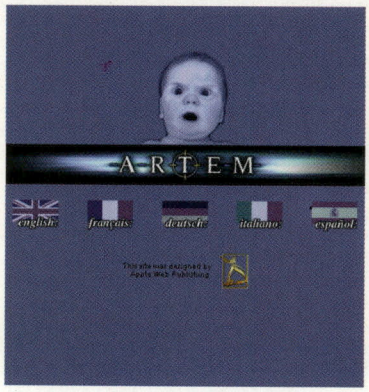
showcase

FROM THE INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT OF HOOVER.CO.UK, TO THE AESTHETIC PERFECTION OF WALLPAPER.COM, WE BRING YOU 16 OF THE COOLEST SITES AROUND...


HYDE PARK
PARK GATES
Rush Keeper
Run = 'N' and 'M' alternately Jump = 'SPACEBAR'
Hoof it = hold down 'SHIFT' on approach to the ball. Run Back = 'B'

9

10



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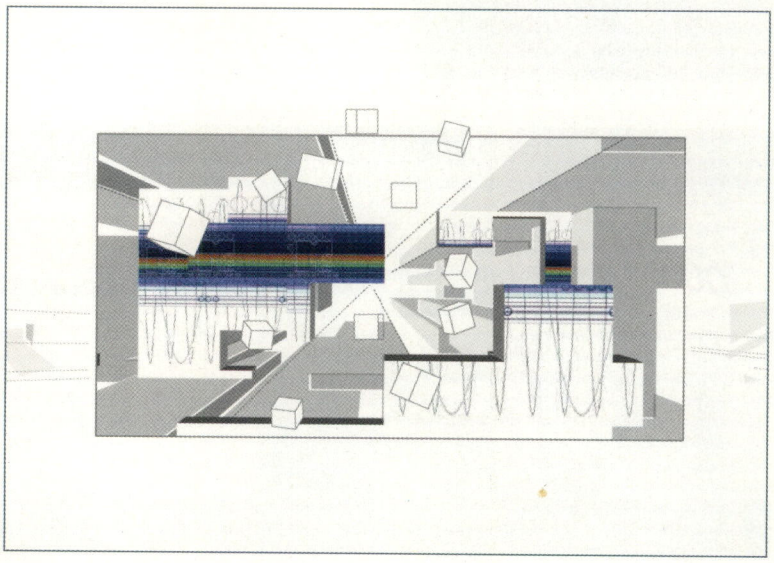


12

9 PARKLIFE ONLINE

www.nikelondon.com by AKQA (www.akqa.co.uk)

'Just do it' is a familiar tagline. And that's just what design agency AKQA did for Nike's new London site. If you like nothing better than popping down to Hyde Park or Clapham Common for a pick-up game of footy, this is for you. The site invites you to search for pitches in your area, a directory of teams needing players, and another full of players seeking teams. There's even a *Shockwave* game in which you have to avoid a park keeper who's trying to confiscate your ball and eject you from his park. It's so much safer than the real thing, and just as compelling as a Sunday afternoon sweat. As a way for Nike to spread its mantra online, it works wonders. Clever, imaginative and useful.

10 BANJAMAN VIBRATION

www.banja.com by Chman (www.chman.com)

The French are famous for their strange design sensibility and thankfully this also holds true for the Internet, as a new site called Banja demonstrates. Designed by French agency Chman, Banja is a game which aims to take you on a musical journey to a mystery island called Itland, courtesy of *Flash*. The first page leads you on your overseas trek – a sort of vector-drawn odyssey, and there's plenty of sound and colour to keep you captivated. Chman shows off *Flash*'s capability as a tool for total animation.

11 PROSTHETICALLY PLEASING

www.artem.com by The Apple Agency (www.apple.co.uk)

Computer special effects may be all the rage in feature films, but there's still a place for animatronics and latex models. This is the work of Dutch company Artem, and Scunthorpe's Apple Agency has just redeveloped its Website. One section provides you with background on the model-based work undertaken at Artem, from animatronics and prosthetics, through to liquids and atmospherics. And if you're planning your own feature films, there's advice on hire and sales via Artem. Simple to navigate, the site's blue colour scheme keeps it approachable.

12 I WANT MY MTV

www.mtv2.co.uk by Digit (www.digit1.com)

London-based design agency Digit has been beavering away for around six months to bring you the relaunched site of niche music channel MTV2. This is a captivating and subtle Website, containing just a dab of *Flash*. Its design could be termed 'industrial design meets *Tetris*', and the site's clearly defined sections aim to make you your own VJ. For example, you can view the channel's playlist, select songs and submit a playlist of your own which will go to air if it's good enough. Fantastic.

13 ROOMFUL OF DESIGN

www.wallpaper.com by I-D Media (www.i-dmedia.com)

Style magazine *Wallpaper** has launched an ultra-cool *Flash* site that provides an ambient browsing experience, showcasing photography, design and desirable consumable items. Content sections appear on a clutter-free, sliding interface. Designed by international new media agency I-D Media, the site makes good use of colour palettes, minimalist text and line-art images. What's more, the *Flash* front-end behind the scenes integrates with JavaScript, PHP scripts and a MySQL database to support member subscriptions and e-commerce. Every page is finely crafted and the majority of photos on the site were specially commissioned.

14 PRIDE OF DIGITAL DESIGN

www.lionhead.co.uk by Lionhead inhouse

Game development house Lionhead Studios is roaring ahead on the Web, with a site that shakes your browser window – literally, thanks to a nifty JavaScript. The site features a well-designed *Flash* menu, with circular icons that clunk across your screen, accompanied by sonorous sound samples. Besides having the usual portfolio/marketing content, the site showcases Lionhead's *Black & White* PC game. The site was developed inhouse, and was intended to be fun and interesting, rather than elitist and clever.

15 READING ROCKS ONLINE

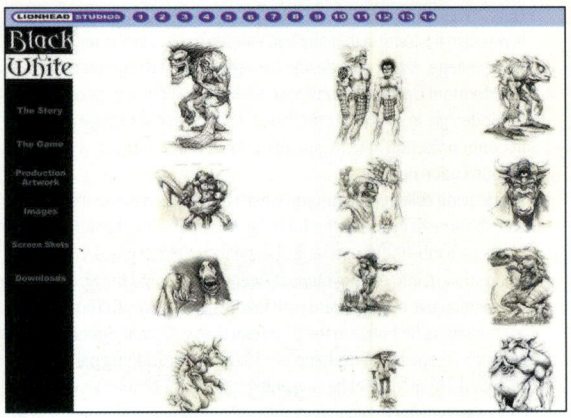
www.meanfiddler.com/reading festival by Kerb (www.kerb.co.uk)

Sites designed to promote events are becoming increasingly sophisticated, as this site proves. It was created by the Brighton-based Kerb agency, and uses *Flash* to good effect (one of Kerb's strengths). It's based on a virtual festival experience and starts with a picture of a boy and girl wearing their underwear. You click on the underwear to enter the virtual festival, which has similar attractions to the real thing – including a main stage and a merchandise section. The site was built in two months by Kerb. The *Flash* content was integrated into *Generator* by another company, Lighthouse, to create dynamically updatable pages.

16 POINTLESS GOOD FUN

www.kleber.net/klebeband by Kleber inhouse

Klebeband, made by music specialist Kleber, is a concept that entertains and challenges, with a clock-style navigation system, minimalist text and line art images that move smoothly across the screen. The site was constructed using JavaScript, Dynamic HTML, *Flash* and *QuickTime* by joint directors Dorian Moore and Chris McGrail, at the request of the Remedi Project (www. theremedi project.com) – an initiative that spotlights the work of UK Web designers. ■



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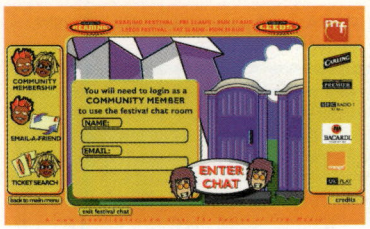

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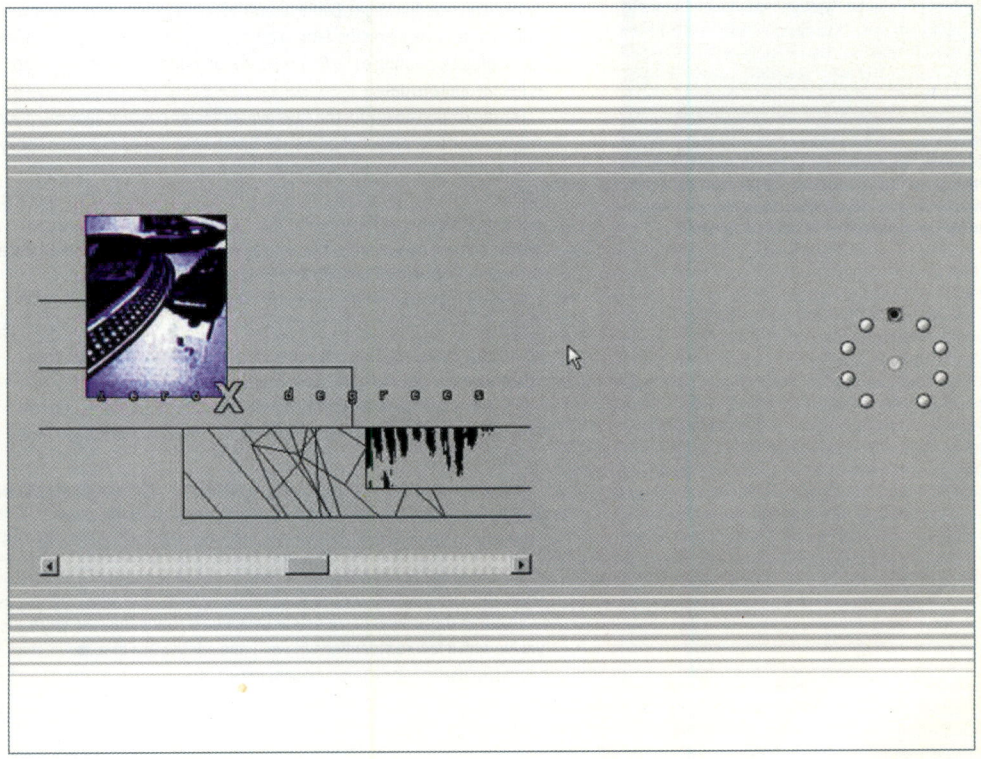
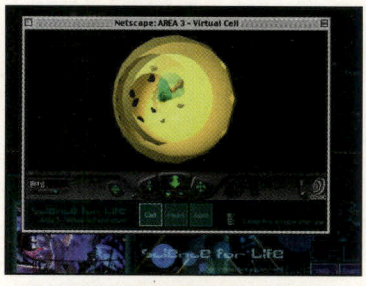


16

Name:	Nicky Gibson
Age:	22
Job title:	Interactive designer
Company:	Deepend Design
Example of work:	www.althorp.com www.tango.com www.caffreys.com www.jwt.co.uk
Fave project:	Althorp Estate
Before:	Ravensbourne College, Kent
Goals for 2005	"Wherever the industry goes, I'd like to be doing the type of work that makes a difference"
Contact:	www.deepend.co.uk/020 7247 2999



Nicky's award-winning entry for the Royal Society of Arts interactive media competition, the springboard to her job as interactive designer at Deepend.

making waves

NICKY GIBSON MAY BE FRESH FROM COLLEGE, BUT HER MULTI-DISCIPLINED BACKGROUND HAS SEEN HER MAKE QUICK PROGRESS AT DEEPEND DESIGN

Everyone remembers their first day at work. You settle in at your desk, meet your new colleagues and, if you're feeling adventurous, perhaps even make a cup of tea. But for Nicky Gibson, interactive designer at London's Deepend Design, the reality was somewhat different. "On my first day at Deepend I took over the Rolex project," she recalls. "I was a bit like, 'Okay'. It was quite pressured."

It was also a situation that she had wanted to be in since her first days at college. A year on a design management and multimedia course at De Montford University convinced Nicky that her true passion lay in graphic design. In 1996 she enrolled at Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication in Kent, spending three years studying visual communication design.

And leaving college last autumn wasn't the fearful experience for the Ravensbourne alumnus as it is for most. Whereas a lot of graduates embark on a job-finding crusade at the end of their degrees, Nicky walked straight into employment at Deepend. Winning the Royal Society of Arts interactive media award with fellow student Alex Griffin helped, as did scooping first prize in the BT interactive ADSL trial. Simon Waterfall, Deepend's creative director, happened to be on the judging panel for the RSA award. He liked what he saw and got her in for an interview. The rest, as they say, is history.

Of course, it's still early days at Deepend for Nicky, but she has already worked on sites for Tango, Caffreys, and advertising company J Walter Thompson. Working on the Tango commission was fun, she says, but her latest project, creating a site for Princess Diana's family home at Althorp, is her favourite to date.

Having responsibility for the site's overall design concept allowed Nicky the freedom to express her own style. Somewhat surprisingly for a family estate, Althorp was willing to embrace the new technology. The brief called for a modern site that embodied Diana's character and yet kept the traditional manner of the estate intact. "It was quite a challenge to be given such a sensitive project," she recounts. "I wanted to do something a bit more stylish without taking it completely out of context."

Programming and producing a map of the estate in *Flash* meant Nicky could create something that looks good and yet serves its purpose at the same time. Split into three sections on a *Flash* timeline, the plan gives visitors a multi-layered guided tour of the estate.

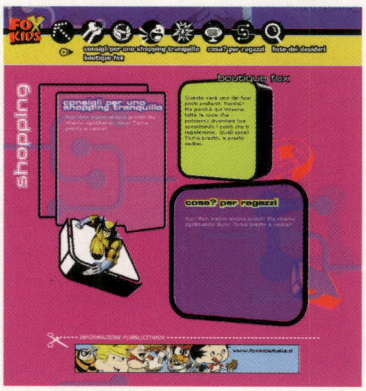
"My aim was to give people online a feel of going to Althorp," she says. "It's really meant for those who aren't actually going to make the journey to Northampton."

With Althorp behind her, Nicky is moving on to customisation projects. But how would she herself explain the rapid progress of her career? "At Ravensbourne we focused a lot on *Flash*; we also did a lot of *Director* work and graphics training," she concedes. "I think it's fairly unique to come from college with both backgrounds. It makes you quite useful."

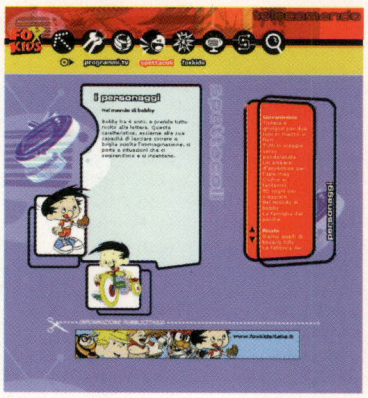
So is that the answer to success at Deepend? "I think they like you if you've won a few competitions as well," she adds with a grin. ■

TEXT: **KEITH DREW** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **JAMIE BEEDEN**

Name:	Derek Ahmedzai
Age:	23
Job title:	Interactive developer/ animator
Company:	AMX Studios
Example of work:	www.fantastic.com www.uprush.com www.foxkidsitalia.it
Fave project:	www.foxkidsitalia.it
Before:	Freelance
Goals for 2005	"I hope the Internet becomes a lot more like our vision of broadband. And that there are better tools to work with"
Contact:	www.amxstudios.com/020 7613 5300



The Fox Kids site involved Derek taking supplied imagery and giving it life with *Flash* technology.



Each Fox Kids site is based on the same code. Derek found the creation of this 'one size fits all' way of working particularly fascinating.

mixing business with pleasure

AMX STUDIOS' DEREK AHMEDZAI WAS TURNING JAPANESE – UNTIL HE DECIDED TO BECOME A WEB DESIGNER INSTEAD

Derek Ahmedzai is living proof that you should take your hobby seriously. Five years ago, he was an undergraduate Japanese language student at King Alfred's College in Winchester, nursing a healthy sideline interest in Web design. His intention was to become a translator where he could also indulge his passion for messing around on the Internet. But then he realised his plans were more complex than he first thought: "The difficulty of doing or even finding such a job hit me, so I thought I would do something a little different," he says.

Different indeed. He decided that the best course of action was to become a Web designer. After finishing his degree in Japanese, he set off along a path that saw him learning the ins and outs of JavaScript, HTML, ASP, *Flash* and *FlashScript* from a cost-effective, yet logical source: the Web. Derek frequented haunts such as Web Monkey, while also paying attention to coding tricks from existing Websites. Always a fast learner, it wasn't long before Derek had a firm grasp of the technology, and soon found himself proficient enough to win contract work as a freelance Web developer.

In September 1999 he applied to be a developer/ animator at AMX Studios, one of London's leading interactive development agencies. AMX recognised Derek as being a highly creative self-starter and immediately snapped him up, putting him to work on the BT Uprush 'youth culture' Website, as well as one for broadband purveyor, the Fantastic Corporation.

Derek is enjoying his time at AMX, and with reason: "The designers here are quite willing to be adventurous, and that's a good thing," he says. "I'm given quite a lot of rein in what I do, so I can say things like, 'What about this dynamic scrolling page?' and they'll say, 'Yes, that looks good.' It's quite experimental in that sense."

At the moment, Derek is busy completing a big job for Fox Kids, Europe. The project entails the launch of ten Websites throughout Europe over the next few months; the first site to go live was the Italian version in April this year, quickly followed by the UK site. German, French and Polish are next in the pipeline.

While Derek's previous work for AMX centred on the back-end, using both HTML and DHTML, the Fox Kids project is his favourite to date.

"It's a really huge project," he enthuses. "I've worked on the *Flash* navigation, which is interesting. But I'm also working on the back-end as well – the nitty-gritty of programming."

The sites are powered by Vignette, but the code from site to site remains largely the same. His job involves taking supplied assets – graphics and other corporate elements – from Fox Kids, and injecting them with life so that they'll capture the attention of children. But the design must also work between many European countries, and between their respective languages.

The site is designed in English, with space left on a kind of template for other countries to insert their native editorial. But even this has its problems.

"German words are about 10-20 per cent longer than English words," Derek explains. "You have to try to work it all out beforehand." The task which he found the most challenging, though, was ultimately the one in which he takes the most pride: "I'm quite proud of the navigation, but the back-end, the fact that it's going to be serving ten sites from the same HTML, is quite fascinating," he remarks.

Derek isn't sure what his next project at AMX is likely to be, but that isn't to say he'll have an easy ride over the next few months. The Italian Fox Kids site will be followed by an English version, with gradual rollouts to eight other European countries by the end of the year planned.

His bosses have every confidence in him: "You give him a job and he just goes out and does it," says his one-time mentor and senior interactive developer at AMX, Phil Bignell.

When he heard this resounding recommendation, Derek laughed: "What more can I say?" ■

TEXT: **GRAEME AYMER** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **JAMIE BEEDEN**

FIRE
BREAK GLASS

the turner prize

GRANT TURNER FINDS REWARD IN SWAPPING TINNIES FOR TEA AT E-COMMERCE SPECIALIST HYPERLINK

Few people would be pleased at having to give up the sunny climes of down under for the wind and rain of the English capital; but Grant Turner, art director of Covent Garden-based Hyperlink, has found the experience extremely satisfying. This time last year he was working in Sydney as Australian *Vogue*'s art director. He might still be there today, but for a slip-up by Australian immigration's visa department that forced him home. Sydney's loss, though, was Hyperlink's gain.

Before joining Hyperlink, Grant's career was "90 per cent magazines". Art director at *Arena* before his antipodean trip, he has also worked on *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan*, *GQ* and *Marie Claire*. But in recent years he had started to question the fluidity of the industry he was working in. Frustrated with the static nature of magazines, Grant saw the Web as a chance to stretch his creativity again.

"With the Web, there's almost no barriers as to what you can do," he enthuses. "You are really only restricted by what your client wants from its site."

If it was professional principles that made him choose the medium, it was personal reasons that dictated which company. Hyperlink had one simple advantage – Yannis Marcou, its creative director. Grant explains: "Yannis is a bit of a visionary. He had a really good approach to what we were going to do here, which I liked. He also chooses people for what they can bring to the company."

And what did Yannis see in Grant? "Probably imagery, plus the ability to develop content," he says. "With my editorial background, looking at content – the hierarchy of information and how to communicate it quickly to your audience – is something that I feel comfortable doing. Magazines teach you that, and it's a good skill to have on the Web."

Grant immediately had a chance to prove this with the Whittard site, his first project at Hyperlink. The company had already won the pitch by the time he joined, but the site's design was left solely up to him. "What I did was very different from the pitch," he says. "But Whittard loved it."

Developing the concept of the company online and fitting this in with its marketing strategy was easier than Grant had expected. "Visiting the stores, I found that the company's packs had quite a sophisticated design," he explains. "That's always a good start, as you know it's going to understand what you're trying to do."

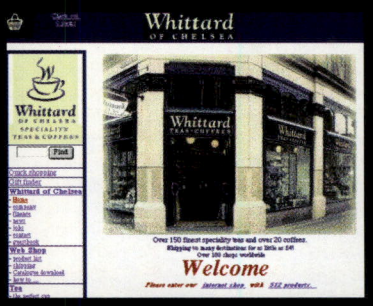
However, portraying tea as a fashionable commodity was an altogether different task. "Coffee is marketed with a specific idea of being quite sexy," he says. "My problem was how to make that work in tea, how to get people to understand tea in such a way – but I think we've pretty much achieved that."

Online sales supports this, but Whittard is more than just a trend-setter for tea. Working on the project has given Grant an appreciation of the traditional English company's ethics, something he's keen to convey in future content.

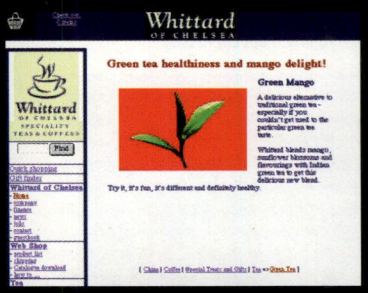
"Whittard pays above average for its tea in certain areas because it's supporting that community," he says. "For example, the money it paid to Darjeeling went into buying schools and hospitals for the local residents. It would be nice to fit that angle into the site somewhere too." Now that really is designing with passion. ■

TEXT: **KEITH DREW** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **JAMIE BEEDEN**

Name:	Grant Turner
Age:	35
Job title:	Art director
Company:	Hyperlink plc
Example of work:	www.whittard.com www.allders.co.uk
Fave project:	www.whittard.com
Before:	Australian *Vogue*, Sydney
Goals for 2005	"What we have at the moment is a window of opportunity. We are in that period where it's still very fluid, and I want to play a part in developing that"
Contact:	020 7240 8121 / www.hyperlink.com



An intoxicating brew: Grant has brought his considerable magazine experience into play to make tea fashionable again.



Smooth, recognisable graphics to promote branding and strong editorial content is key: descriptions, comparisions and advice steer users to online buys.

the talented mr seymour

FROM COPY SHOP TO LONDON AGENCY, HOW PAUL SEYMOUR BROUGHT A FEW *FLASH* TRICKS TO THE MOONFRUIT WEBSITE

Name:	Paul Seymour
Age:	24
Job title:	*Flash* programmer
Company:	Sixzeds Ltd
Examples of work:	www.moonfruit.com www.teencancer.org (*Mr Worm* and *Police Shot* in teenzone) www.sendathing.com (*Dirt Track Racer*)
Fave project:	*Dirt Track Racer*, sendathing.com
Before:	Printek copy shop, Kingston, Surrey
Goals for 2005	"The Web will become more of a source of entertainment, and I think that sort of entertainment-based Internet is where I'd like to be."
Contact:	www.sixzeds.com/ 020 7434 3233

Part of Paul's job was to implement a *Flash*-driven database that enables you to get your site up and running quickly and without any hassle.

One of Paul's favourite elements of Moonfruit.com is the design wizard, Moonfruit control, which guides you through building your site.

Picture this: you're working in a copy shop, photocopying day in and day out. Then, when you least expect it, your boss comes along and says, "I've got big plans for you." What do you do?

In the case of Paul Seymour, he got the hell out. Before landing a job as designer and *Flash* developer at London's Sixzeds digital design agency, he spent four years learning graphic design (a BTec from Guildford College, 1994 to 1996, an HND from City College, Manchester, 1996 to 1998), and a year and a half learning *Flash* at Sixzeds – which is pretty much how he came to be working on Moonfruit.com

Paul happened upon graphic design after a suggestion from a family friend, and since his A Level results were unlikely to gain him a place at university, he took the plunge and enrolled in the aforementioned courses. He then found himself working in the copy shop, until that timely comment by his boss convinced him it was time to leave. Luckily, opportunity then knocked in the form of Sixzeds chief, Joe White.

The two had been friends in secondary school but had lost touch during the years of tertiary education. However, a pub reunion got the ball rolling, and Seymour spotted his chance and grabbed it with both hands. He made an appointment to show his portfolio to White and Tony Short, Sixzeds' creative director, and was hired in September 1998. Since then he's applied his talents to Websites for Kalchas (www.kalchas.com, a case study in the careers section), as well as the Egg intranet and the Teenage Cancer Trust (www.teencancer.org), where he devised worm and shooting games in the teenzone.

Most recently, though, Paul has been concentrating on Moonfruit's high-profile site which invites you to design your own Web space, but with funkier interfaces than those offered by, say, Geocities or Xoom.

Moonfruit was always going to be a challenge for the agency, as Paul remembers only too well: "When Tony, Wendy (Tan, Moonfruit CEO) and Joe first came up with the concept, it was like, 'Oh, you can't do that, that's ridiculous'. But then Tony had his vision and we just had to go for it."

And go for it they did. Paul's role largely centred on making the *Flash* components behave. Responsibility for the visuals fell on Kevin Foster and Amy Robins, then Paul and Tony knuckled down to making the whole thing work. They started the project in late summer 1999 and completed it in January.

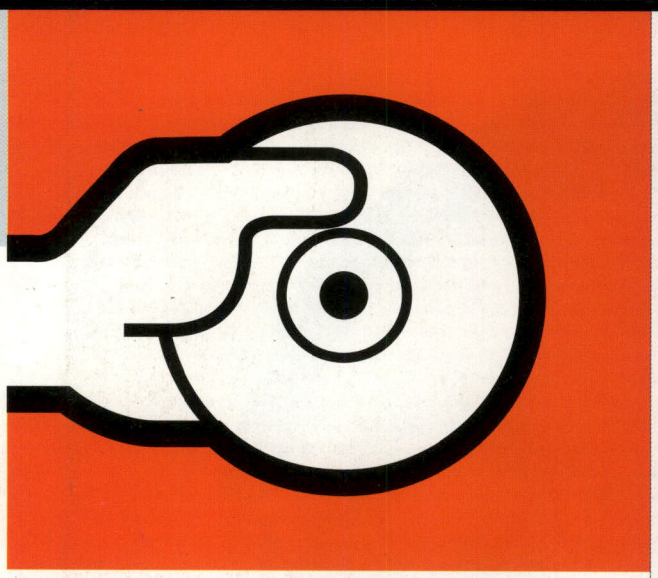
Dear to Paul's heart is the design wizard – Moonfruit control – which guides you through the process of building your site, together with a logo builder he developed with Tony Short, although this has yet to be incorporated.

Paul adds that the trickiest aspect was the site directory. The directory is a database, and the interface needed to accommodate users adding, deleting and searching for information via a funky, user-friendly, *Flash*-style interface. "It was like building a file structure. It was hard work," he winces.

And what do the Sixzeds bosses think of the talented Mr Seymour? Well, Tony clearly holds him in high regard, as he left the design of the database directory in his hands. And as for Joe White? Paul comments: "I know how he describes me when he's drunk, he's always gushingly complimentary. But I don't think he wants to massage my ego too much." ■

TEXT: **GRAEME AYMER** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **JAMIE BEEDEN**

"TOO OFTEN, SITES HAVE GREAT CONTENT BUT YOU CAN'T FIND IT. WE PLAN TO BRUSH ASIDE ALL THE HYPE AND GET STRAIGHT TO THE POINT OF MAKING A GREAT SITE" JAMES BYFORD, GETFRANK



CD HEAVEN

OUR CD-ROM WILL HAVE YOU IN WEB PARADISE

WITH WAP toolkits, Macromedia software and 3D design demos all vying for a place, this month's CD-ROM is absolutely packed full of useful resources.

WAP is a definite buzzword throughout new media agencies at the moment. We've reflected this on our CD by including full programs of the Nokia *WAP Toolkit* and WAP server, as well as *WinWAP Light 2.3* and *Wireless Companion* demos.

Macromedia may not have plans to branch out into the WAP software market just yet, but we've given the San Francisco-based company a good chunk of space to show how it could affect the way you design.

The words Macromedia and Web design are pretty much synonymous, which is why our CD has demos of *Director 8*, *Flash 4*, *Dreamweaver 3*, *FreeHand 9* and *Fireworks 3*, to enable you to design buttons, animations and page comps in minutes. Adobe also features with demos of *GoLive 4* and *Photoshop 5.5*.

If you like the sound of the software reviewed on pages 106 & 107, then the CD will give you the opportunity to take a closer look. Demos of Cycore's *Cult3D 5.0*, the *Vectorscape Virtual Browser* and MGI Software's *Zoom Server 3.5* are all included.

The CD also provides links to sites featured throughout the magazine. So if you want to check out the navigation issues of the Levi's Twisted site for yourself, you're only one click away.

You can find this issue's fantastic CD nestling between pages 34 and 35. ■

BRIGHTON'S NEW WEB DESIGN ROCK

NEW SOUTH COAST DIGITAL FACILITY INSPIRES FAT LES TO ESCHEW SELF STIMULATION

A NUMBER of digital media heavyweights have banded together to form a new studio, GetFrank. The new facility is based in Brighton and is helmed by former Netscape Online content director, Gary Stevenson and former AOL senior editor Andrew Seel. They are joined by a third partner, ex-Victoria Real digital media producer James Byford.

Their rationale is simple: "Too often, sites have great content but you can't find it," comments James Byford. "Bad design is becoming all too common. We plan to brush aside all the hype surrounding new media and get straight to the point of making great sites."

The new company has formed a strategic alliance with Byford's former employer, Brighton's Victoria Real, which specialises in creating content for interactive television.

The company's client list already includes FT.com, AOL and EMI. The company's first product was the Fat Les 2000 site, launched to coincide with the Euro 2000 soccer tournament. The site formed a viral marketing campaign in which you could play *Pong*-style using Keith Allen's and Alex James' – alias Fat Les – heads as paddles, and a can as a ball.

"Working with Fat Les enabled GetFrank to show off what it does best: creating innovative online experiences," says creative director Andrew Seel.

According to Fat Les, the site is: "More interesting than picking your nose, more satisfying than picking your arse." ■

w: **www.getfrank.com**

w: **www.fatles2000.com**

MACROMEDIA PLUGS INTO WAP

WAP OBJECTS FOR DREAMWEAVER BY NOKIA AND MACROMEDIA

A DEAL between Macromedia and Nokia has recently given rise to the *Nokia WML Studio* for *Dreamweaver*.

The new product is a *Dreamweaver* plug-in that enables you to create WML visually for WAP-enabled Nokia mobile telephones. Once installed, *Nokia WML Studio* appears in your *Dreamweaver* menu bar.

For the time being, it's a Windows-only release, but Macromedia says there's a Mac release just around the corner. If you want to know more, *Nokia WML Studio* is available for beta download from the Macromedia Website now. ■

w: **exchange.macromedia.com**

STAFF ROOM

BERKSHIRE E-COMMERCE AGENCY OFFERS £50,000 FOR SUITABLE STAFF

E-COMMERCE AGENCY Entranet has upped the stakes of its recently announced skills bounty, originally set at £3,000, to £50,000.

In March, the company, which has designed and built Websites for the likes of Williams F1 and Eagle Star, offered the £3,000 reward to anyone who referred an employment candidate to the company. It invested £5 million in training, including an 'e-commerce bootcamp' which candidates have to complete for the offer to be valid.

Since then, 107 people have been taken on by the Goring-on-Thames-based company. However, key positions remain unfilled, causing the company to increase the bonus.

New posts are located at the company's recently completed studio in Soho, which concentrates on the newest of new media, such as iDTV.

"Too much emphasis has been placed on attracting staff through share options," says Entranet CEO Nick Spooner. "That's not the way Europe is going to compete with the US. People need training." ■

w: **www.entranet.co.uk**

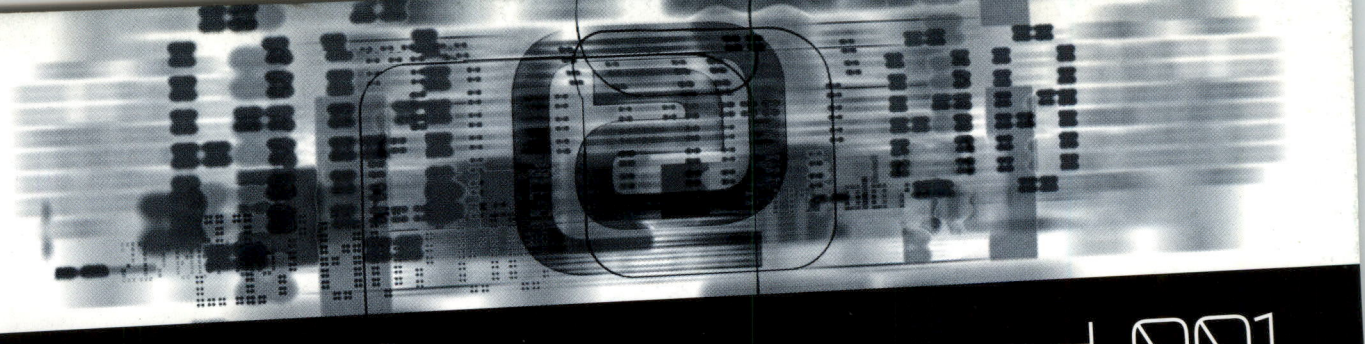
NEXT ISSUE ON SALE TUESDAY 18 JULY

ADVERTISING IS KEY TO UNLOCKING THE REVENUE POTENTIAL OF THE NET. WE EXPLORE THE OPTIONS

NEXT ISSUE we're researching the potential for online advertising. We've all seen zillions of boring banner ads, but there are a wealth of new advertising opportunities starting to emerge.

Besides discovering what can be done with rich media banner ads, we're also delving into such innovative ideas as full-screen *Flash* advertising, the emergence of virtual worlds and a new breed of interstitial ads. Plus, we're looking at desktop branding, interactive TV ads and the future for microsites. We're also putting six industry figures into a room to debate the issues raised and explore exactly how advertising can affect you. If you've ever thought about using or designing ads, we've got the definitive guide to what's happening now and what's just around the corner.

As well as all that, we're also running a *Flash* tutorial, revealing what Last Minute could do to improve its site and we're rounding-up the best handhelds on the market. And of course, we'll have feedback to this month's issue. Don't miss it. ■



create

cd 001

OVER 600MB OF DEMOS, UTILITIES AND ESSENTIAL WEB OFFERINGS. HERE'S YOUR GUIDE TO THIS ISSUE'S CD-ROM

FULL PROGRAM
Nokia WAP Toolkit
Nokia WAP Server

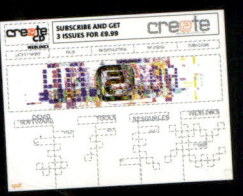
DUAL RESOURCES
Cult3D viewer

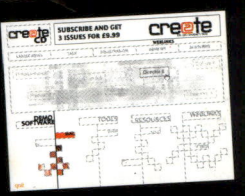
PC DEMOS
Director 8
Dreamweaver 3
Fireworks 3
Flash 4
FreeHand 9
GoLive 4
Photoshop 5.5
Pulse Creator 3.5
TopDog Page Analyst
UP SDK
WinWAP Light 2.3
Wireless Companion
Zoom Server 3.5

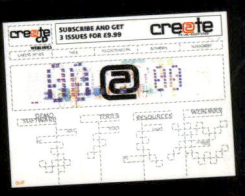
PC RESOURCES
Acrobat Reader
DirectX 6
Metastream 2.1
QuickTime 3
QuickTime 32
Shockwave 7
Netscape Online

MAC DEMOS
Dreamweaver 3 (30-day)
Director 8 (30-day)
Fireworks 3 (30-day)
Flash 4 (30-day)
FreeHand 9 (30-day)
GoLive 4
Photoshop 5.5

MAC RESOURCES
Acrobat Reader 4.05
DropStuff 5.5
StuffIt Expander 5.5
GraphicConverter
Metastream
QuickTime 3
Shockwave 7







CD-ROM BASICS

How do I start the CD?
The CD should auto-run when you insert it into your CD drive. If not, run either: CAiMac or CAiWin32.exe for Win 95/98/NT.
To toggle auto-run on and off, use the control panel on your computer.

Is there Win 3.1 software on the CD?
No. We no longer support Windows 3.1, or 68k on the Mac, due to the high demands of today's interactive multimedia.

Do I need any specific software to run the CD?
You'll need Apple's *QuickTime* to make full use of the CD interface. It's on the CD, and you'll be prompted to install it if you don't already have it.

If you're using a Mac, then the CD interface will work fine with any version of *QuickTime* installed. If, however, you're using Windows and have *QuickTime 3.X* installed, the interface may claim you haven't got it installed. If this happens, install v2.1.2 of *QuickTime* (on the CD), in addition to *QuickTime 3.X*. This won't erase your installation of *QuickTime 3.X*, and solves any problems.

You also need a Web browser and an active Web connection to make use of the Web-linked features of the CD. Make sure you're using one of these browsers:
Internet Explorer 3 or later
Netscape *Navigator 3* or later
(from [W] www.netscape.com).
Connect to your ISP before starting the CD for the Web-linked features.

What if I need further assistance?
Contact technical support via the following means, and in this order:
[E] support@futurenet.co.uk
[W] www.futurenet.co.uk/support
[F] 01225 732 310
[T] 01225 442 244 (lines can be very busy)
Visit [W] www.futurenet.co.uk/support for an FAQ about our CD.

PRODUCTS

NOKIA WAP TOOLKIT
Nokia
[T] 020 8564 3900
[W] www.nokia.com

System requirements:
PC: 100HD, 266 MHz Pentium, 128MB RAM; Java Runtime Environment 1.2.2; Java HotSpot 1.0.1
(30-day licence key from www.nokia.com/corporate/wap)

DEMOS

FLASH 4
Macromedia
[T] 020 8358 5857
[W] www.macromedia.com
System requirements:
PC: 133 MHz Pentium processor; Win 95/98/NT 4; 32MB RAM
Mac: PowerMac with OS 7.5 or later; 32MB RAM

CULT3D 5.0
Cycore
[T] 020 7734 1543
[W] www.cycore.com
System requirements:
PC: Windows 95/98/NT 4; *Navigator 2+* or *IE 4*
Mac: PowerMac; *Navigator 2+* or *IE 4*

VIRTUAL WORLD BROWSER
Vectorscape
[T] 01905 339 055
[W] www.vectorscape.com
System requirements:
PC: 100HD; Win 95/98/NT 4; 16MB RAM; 28.8 Kbps modem

DIRECTOR 8
Macromedia
[T] 020 8358 5857
[W] www.macromedia.com
System requirements:
PC: 200MHz Pentium processor; Win 95/98/NT 4; 32MB RAM
Mac: 180MHz PowerMac; OS 8.1 or later; 32MB RAM

GOLIVE 4
Adobe
[T] 020 8606 4000
[W] www.adobe.co.uk
System requirements:
PC: 200MHz Pentium processor ; Win 98/NT 4 with Service Pack 3; 64MB RAM
Mac: PowerMac; OS 8.5 or later; 48MB RAM

DREAMWEAVER 3
Macromedia
[T] 020 8358 5857
[W] www.macromedia.com
System requirements:
PC: Win 95/98/NT 4; 20HD; 32MB RAM.
Mac: PowerMac; 20HD; OS 8.1; 32MB RAM

PHOTOSHOP 5.5
Adobe
[T] 020 8606 4000
[W] www.adobe.co.uk
System requirements:
PC: 200MHz Pentium processor or later; Win 95/98/NT 4; 125HD; 64MB RAM
Mac: PowerMac; OS 7.6 or later; 125HD; 64MB RAM

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*Source: Zeus web performance tables. Correct at time of going to press.

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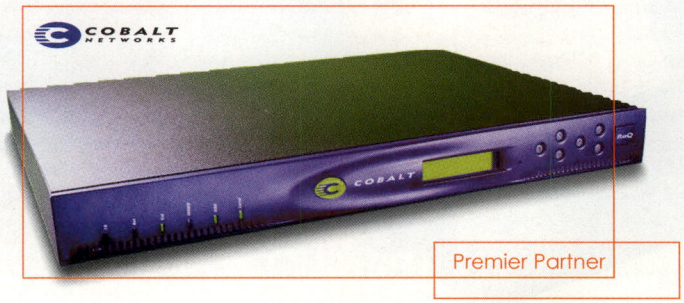
- *Marketing info, full support and advice*



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WIN MEDIA CLEANER COMPRESSION SUITE

GET SERIOUS ABOUT WEB VIDEO AND ADD ANOTHER STRING TO YOUR BOW WITH THIS PRIZE, WORTH NEARLY £900

This is your chance to create high quality video for the Internet. We're offering one lucky winner the chance to bag a copy of the *Media Cleaner Compression Suite* – worth £849 – courtesy of Media 100 subsidiary Terran Interactive.

The *Media Cleaner Compression Suite* consists of three packages. First there is Terran's *Media Cleaner Pro 4* which is the industry standard program for multimedia optimisation. It enables you to stream *QuickTime 4*, *RealSystem G2* and *Windows Media* formats. What's more, it handles output to MPEG-1, AVI, DV, stills and even audio-only formats including MP3.

Media Cleaner also offers lossless conversion between rich-media formats, and there's an optional MPEG-2 upgrade. Plus, because it's wizard-driven, it's easy to publish to Web, kiosk, CD-ROM or DVD.

Then there's *Sorenson Video Developer Edition 2*. Used with *Media Cleaner Pro 4*'s variable bit-rate encoding facility, this application makes your video look sharper on the Web. You could go without, but if you're serious about video on the Web, you'll need this.

Last, the *Media Cleaner Compression Suite* also includes the *QDesign Music Codec 2.0*. If you need your audio to be streamed at a low data rate and at quality higher than that of MP3, look no further. For more info, check out **www.terran.com**

To enter, all you have to do is answer the following question:
What is the current release version of *Media Cleaner Pro*?
a) **3**, b) **4**, c) **5**
Send your answers, including your name, your company's name and address, your email address and a telephone number on a postcard to: **CRE@TE magazine, Media Cleaner Competition, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1M 1FB**
Make sure you specify whether you want a Mac or Windows version. ■

The *Media Cleaner Compression Suite* contains everything you need to turn your Web video into a streaming masterpiece.

Win all you need to set yourself up with a formidable Web presence.

WIN ADOBE AND VERIO WEB BUNDLE

WIN ADOBE WEB DESIGN SOFTWARE, A FREE DOMAIN NAME AND 12 MONTHS FREE HOSTING FROM VERIO

To celebrate the launch of **CRE@TE** magazine, Verio and Adobe have come together to offer you the chance to win the Adobe *Web Collection*, a free domain name and 12 month's free hosting on Verio's Professional Plan – a prize worth over £1100.

Verio (UK) is part of the world's largest domain-based Web hosting company and a leading provider of Internet services to small and mid-size companies. As well as a free domain name of your choice (worth £50), Verio is offering 12 months hosting on its 'Professional Plan' package (normal price £295).

This includes a range of hosting and email facilities to help you create an exciting and interactive Website, plus 50MB of disk space, 10 POP3 mailboxes; 20 email forwarding options and autoresponders, 4000MB per month of data transfer and much more.

You also get *Volano* chat room software and a search facility to create an interactive Website, as well as SSL Secure Server to ensure information can be sent securely over the Web. For more, **www.verio.co.uk**

The other part of the prize comes from Adobe. *Web Collection* is a software suite that enables you to design still and interactive Web graphics. You can then optimise these graphics for efficient downloading, and build dynamic sites that support the latest technology. The package includes *GoLive 5*, *Photoshop 5.5*, *Illustrator 9* and *LiveMotion*.

With *GoLive*, you can create and manage cutting-edge Websites with its innovative visual design tools. *Photoshop* and *Illustrator* are industry-standards and need no introduction; and with *LiveMotion*, you can launch your creativity into orbit with this intuitive solution for professional Web graphics and animation.

To enter, all you have to do is answer the following question:
How much disk space do you get with the Professional Plan?
a) **50MB** b) **100MB** c) **2MB**
Send your answer, together with your name and contact details to the following address:
competition@verio.co.uk ■

THE RULES FOR BOTH COMPETITIONS: The closing date for entries in Wednesday 26 July 2000. Employees of The Future Network, Adobe, Verio, Media 100, Terran Interactive and their agents and families may not enter. Multiple entries will not be accepted.The editor's decision is final. There are no cash alternatives. No other correspondence will be entered into. No purchase is necessary.

made to_measure

THE BIRTH OF A NEW WEBSITE, A TIME FOR BRAINSTORMING, PITCHING AND DEADLINE NIGHTMARES. IN THE FIRST OF A REGULAR SERIES, WE TALK TO THE CREATORS OF A RECENT SITE: THIS MONTH, LATERAL ON LEVI'S

Robbie Williams. Geri Halliwell. The Blair Witch Project UK. Just three of the many sites that have been created by the team at Lateral.

The company's roots began in Obsolete, a Web design firm set up in 1995 by Jon Bains. Come 1997, he and four colleagues shut the company, and from its ashes Lateral was born. Today, it employs 25 people and remains independent.

One of the major names on the company's CV is Levi's. Lateral has been working on the clothes manufacturer's sites for the last five years and recently unveiled its latest redesign for Levi's Europe, where it has created two very distinct sections. First, there's the Straight site (www.eu.levi.com update) which details the product range; and second, the Twisted micro site, which is a showcase for both highly ambitious Web design and the Levi's Engineered Jeans range. We asked Lateral's chairman, Jon Bains, to tell us about the challenges of creating a homepage for one of the world's largest clothing brands. Over to Jon...

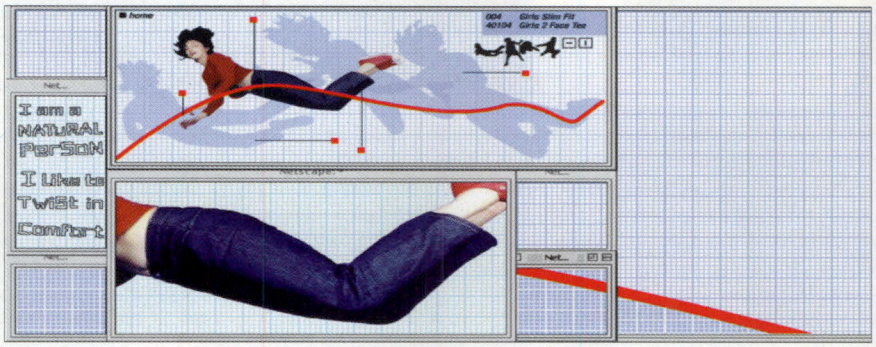
Name:	Levi's European site (spring 2000)
Site:	www.eu.levi.com
Agency:	Lateral (www.lateral.net)
Size of overall team:	Six
Production Length:	www.eu.levi.com update – six weeks Twisted section of the site (Levi's Engineered Jeans Web pages) – seven weeks
No of man hours:	"Hundreds of hours"
Overall cost:	N/A

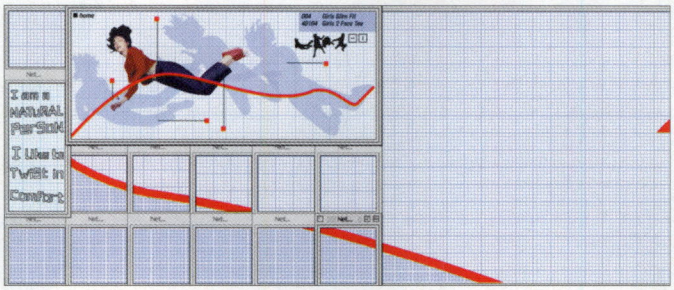
THE STORY OF THE BLUES

Early 1999: "Believe it or not, we started talking about the site more than a year ago. In fact, we're already discussing the one for next April. We do things quite far ahead."

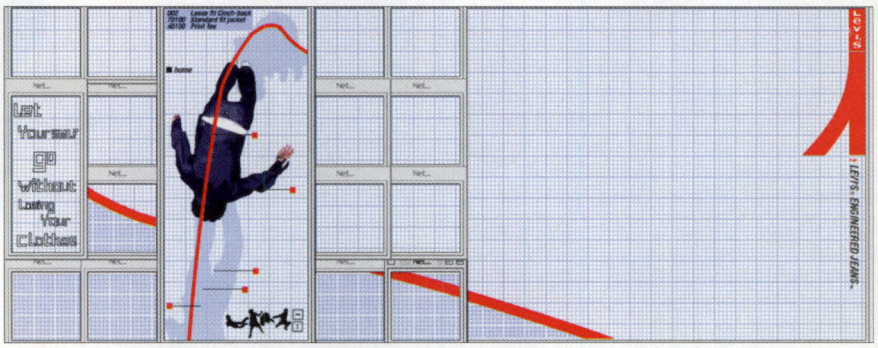
14 December 1999: "With this project, there were two briefs. For the www.eu.levi.com update, the brief was to support retail and let consumers find out what was going on in the Levi's world. It covered all the Levi's products, apart from the Levi's Engineered Jeans. These were to be supported by the Twisted micro site which had a different brief. Levi's wanted something mindblowing; it wanted to see how far we could push it, which was refreshing.

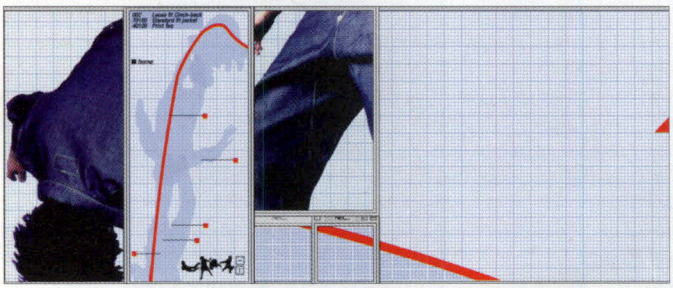
"Being told to go for it can be tough in itself because we didn't ➤



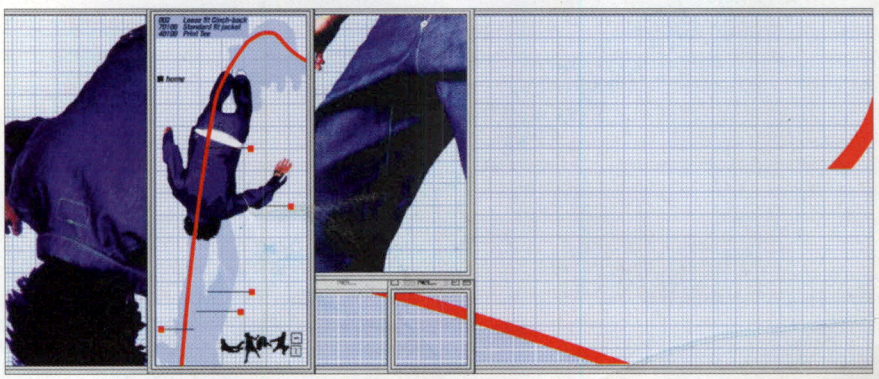


Having worked for Levi's since 1995, this is Lateral's ninth site incarnation. It tears it down and starts all over again every six months.



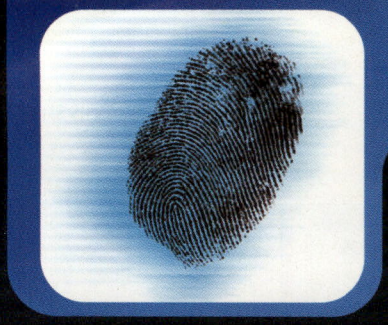


When you first enter the Twisted site, you are besieged by a mass of multiple windows that pop up in the browser. However, as you dig deeper into the site, windows clear away to present an obvious path.



"There were a couple of scares where we thought, oh shit, this isn't going to work"

Jon Bains, Lateral



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have a good way of expressing what we were going to do. Sometimes, with sites like this, it can get a bit organic in the build, so keeping the client happy when we're not 100 per cent certain of how it's going to look can be a challenge.

"The other challenge was the time constraints – the micro site was built in seven weeks! For something so technically complicated, we didn't have that much time to test it either."

15 December: "When it came to generating ideas, we brainstormed. We'd done something similar with the opening windows on the Geri Halliwell site – that was our first attempt. The brief said to 'think out of the box', so we thought we'd do loads of boxes and take the brief to its logical extreme. The original idea behind the site was to do a homepage that worked backwards, so that it started off as incredibly complex and then became simpler as you got further into it. I think we got about 80 per cent of the way there. What we really wanted was to end up with one window after you'd gone down about three levels."

7 January 2000: "We got green-lighted by Levi's after a presentation where we explained the concept and showed them a couple of screens illustrating the idea. Although our direct client, Anne Bowen (see 'The Client' boxout), knows a fair bit about the Web, that might not be true of her bosses, so we needed to have something visual to show them.

"After the presentation, the feedback was along the lines of, 'We like this, we don't like that, you've forgotten to put this in' and so on. It had all happened very quickly because we had so little time. Most of the comments concerned aesthetic stuff to make sure the site tied in with the print ads, such as tweaking blues and making sure the product was shown correctly. There were some issues about the navigation. We know it's not an easy site to navigate!"

TWISTED MICRO SITE PRODUCTION

21 February: "The windows on the Geri site were dead simple compared to those on Twisted; the main task was getting the windows to talk to each other. Things that appear simple weren't. For instance, when you close one window, all the others would close down automatically, and just getting that to always work was tough. We also had to deal with the fact that punters might start moving or resizing the windows, as that would result in everything fucking up! So we had to make sure the windows snapped back to where they're supposed to be. It works about 80 per cent of the time..."

24 February: "Other technical issues included making the site cross-browser compatible. We did check a 4.0 site, but all browser versions are different – 4.0 is different from 4.01 – so trying to get it to work on everything was a nightmare.

"There were a couple of scares where we thought, oh shit, this isn't going to work! For instance, how the site was navigating, when we thought that it was just becoming overly complex. We had a few reality checks and thought, fuck! What have we done? There weren't any specific issues, just certain moments. One of the problems is the memory it needs when all the windows are open. On prototype versions, as soon as you started running *Shockwave* and *Flash* at the same time with 16 windows open, it did bring computers to their knees."

2 March: "One version we did was absolutely stunning. We had this *Shockwave* movie running across all the windows in this gorgeous trail. It worked really well but would have

TROUBLESHOOTING

SALLY BROOKS, LEVI'S PROJECT MANAGER AT LATERAL, TALKS US THROUGH SOME PROBLEM SOLVING

THE PROBLEM

"One of the biggest challenges technically was to make JavaScript – which originated from Netscape's original scripting language – work between spawned windows, regardless of hierarchy. This posed a significant problem because windows spawned by JavaScript code are 'transparent' to each other, and are only accessible from their respective parent or immediate child."

THE ANSWER

"The way to overcome this was to spawn all the sub-windows from one single browser window, the 'father'. JavaScript function calls then had to move through the parent window, via a function call that evaluates the function in the father document, then executes the code locally as opposed to in the calling document. Hence the window hierarchy is flattened. This could have been a major problem, as the site had to work across all platforms."

THE CLIENT

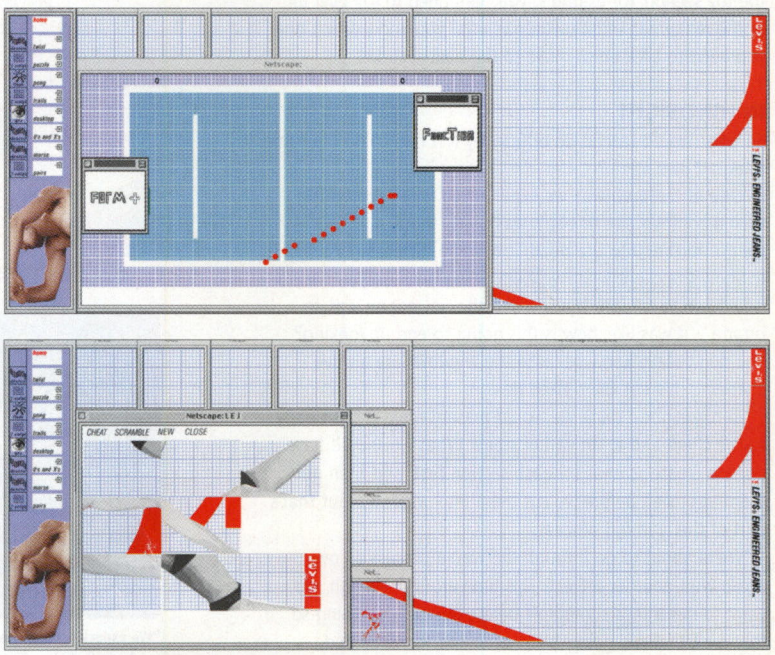
THE SITE'S FINISHED. IT'S GONE LIVE. BUT IS THE CLIENT HAPPY, OR MERELY PUTTING ON A BRAVE FACE?

Lateral's contact with Levi's is Anne Bowen, the multinational's direct-to-consumer marketing manager for Europe. Not surprisingly, she's very pleased with the end result, particularly the micro site. "I wish everyone could have really speedy computers because then they could enjoy the [micro] site at its best. It's incredible when you have a fast machine."

Anne admits that the production process worked, but adds: "Creation is a messy process and everyone has to remember that, all the time – especially when you're giving out a brief such as we did for the micro site. We asked Lateral to do something totally different, something twisted. We wanted to treat the convention of a Website in the same way we treated convention with the rest of our campaign."

Indeed, she readily admits that such briefs do involve a leap of faith. "We have a long-lasting relationship with Lateral, and that helps. There were the usual ups and downs during the process, but there were also magic moments, like the last four days of production when everything was coming together and working. The result's there and we've achieved what we set out to do."

Perhaps the real proof of Levi's seal of approval is the fact that discussions are already under way with Lateral about the site's next incarnation.



The Lateral team particularly enjoyed building the toy section. Its unique visual spins on old classics such as Pong are designed as an intriguing diversion for the site visitor.

needed three computers to run it, so we scrapped it. The memory overheads were a bit scary."

3 March: "When the client presented the first prototype to a bunch of other folk at Levi's, it crashed her machine. It was the first prototype that hadn't really been tested and we knew it was flaky. She wasn't very happy, but we had warned her. We had just 24 hours to fix it so that she could show it to people. Ultimately, most of the problems were small, but when you're under that amount of pressure and you're doing far too much at the same time, every problem is a big problem."

TWISTED MICROSITE LAUNCH

6-8 March: "Towards the end of the production cycle it was absolute chaos. People were shouting at each other. They were doing 24-hour shifts. It was absolutely insane. The main problem was we still didn't have a lot of the content for the site because we didn't get the ads until three days before the launch."

9 March: "The biggest triumph was the day the site was launched. It was quite amusing: you're burnt out by the end of the project and you never want to see the site again. We'd been working on this stuff for three months solid, and you always forget that you're working for the launch of an ad campaign. So, just when we've finished and are thinking, thank fuck, we can forget about it for a minute, all of a sudden the ads are all over the place! You switch on the telly and there are bloody Levi's ads everywhere. It's like, 'No, go away! Arggggghhhh!'"

10 March onwards: "The feedback we've had from the public about the site is about 50:50 love it:hate it, which is what we expected. Negative feedback from the public has fundamentally concerned the navigation – the fact that it's not immediately obvious that you have to click on the windows to navigate to the next section. Once you're into the toy section, for example, you then need to roll over all of the remaining empty windows until you know which one you need to click on to move to the next section."

IN HINDSIGHT

So what would Lateral do differently if it had to do the same thing all over again?

"One of the problems we experienced when presenting such a complex site to Levi's was pretty much our fault. As we got further into the build, it became increasingly difficult to show the client what we were doing because you had to drill down so far into the site and the navigation was so bizarre – it was like, how is this going to end up looking? You don't really know because the windows are always changing, it's not like a fixed design.

"In hindsight, I think we would present ideas more clearly to the client and at an earlier stage. What we should have done is create screens for each section first, and then got them approved before we cut them into windows. But that's part of the learning process.

"We're about to go through the whole process all over again with another project. This time around, though, we want to get things signed off before building anything so that we can avoid going backwards and forwards and slowing things down." ■

TEXT: **ADAM PHILLIPS**

IMAGE CONSCIOUS

IT'S A THORNY ISSUE – HOW DO YOU PRESENT CLOTHES SUCCESSFULLY ONLINE?

Lateral has already been looking into the issue of clothes presentation on the Internet for some years.

"With the Twisted site, it's a matter of getting the colours right and showing the difference between one shade of blue and another at 72dpi. It's always a problem," says Lateral chairman Jon Bains. "It's about trying to get enough detail on the clothing."

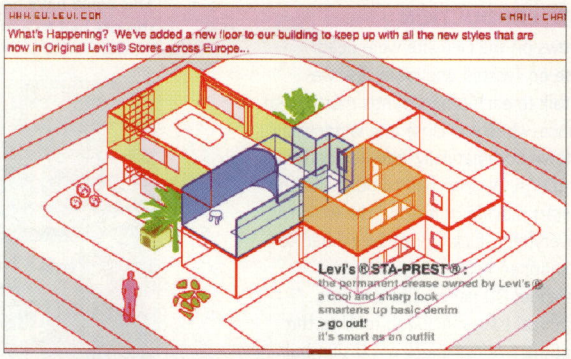
Jon thinks that the company has done quite well with the micro site. "When you go to the products, it zooms in and you can see all of it," he adds. "It all comes down to the photography, so you have to have good photographers. You have to try to capture the essence of the clothes."

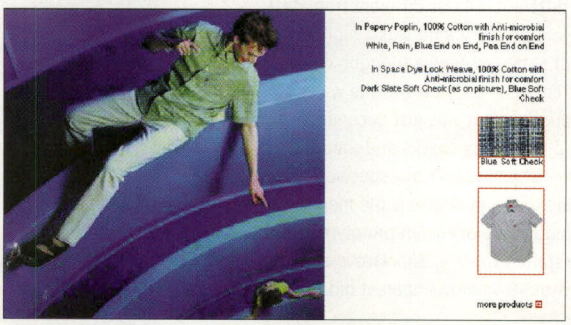
Lateral uses Martin Holtkamp, a German-born photographer whose work has graced the pages of *iD* and campaigns for big timers such as Nike. When he shot the production section of the Twisted micro site, he asked the models to leap up and down on a trampoline so that he could capture them in mid-move.

But is shooting for the Web a different discipline? "You work closely with the people doing the Web design. You listen to what they're saying and their immediate requirements.

"Lateral will tell me what they can do on the Web," he says. "There are some minor design restrictions; for instance, they wanted the models to be free-standing, which meant I couldn't crop or cut off their heads. But you have perimeters before you start and you work within them."

"You have perimeters before you start and you work within them" – Product photographer Martin Holtkamp on 0958 299085.


What's Happening? We've added a new floor to our building to keep up with all the new styles that are now in Original Levi's® Stores across Europe...
Levi's® STA-PREST®:
the permanent crease owned by Levi's®
a cool and sharp look
smartens up basic denim
> go out!
it's smart as an outfit


In Papery Poplin, 100% Cotton with Anti-microbial finish for comfort
White, Rain, Blue Eind on End, Pea End on End
In Space Dye Look Weave, 100% Cotton with Anti-microbial finish for comfort
Dark Slate Soft Check (as on picture), Blue Soft Check
Blue Soft Check
more products

"We especially like the product section as it captures the true essence of the products by using *Shockwave* movies, plus the close-up detail shots do a great job of showcasing the more intricate details of the products." – Sally Brooks, project manager for Levi's at Lateral.

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More than 66%* of customers abandon the items they've placed in their online shopping baskets before completing the sale. Filling in numerous personal details, multiple user names and forgettable passwords is often considered too time consuming and tedious. Customers are also concerned about the security of the financial information they are expected to provide. Is it any wonder that only a minority complete their online transactions?

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ananova.com

PRESS ASSOCIATION NEW MEDIA HAS A NEW NAME AND A NEW STAR: ANANOVA. SHE COULD HAVE BEEN A GREEN BABOON. FORTUNATELY, SHE'S NOT

News anchors are serious people. To be taken seriously as a newsreader they have to look serious, sound serious and dress serious. They should sit reading about serious things in our increasingly serious world, preferably in a serious south-east English accent so we understand just how serious they are. But what if the news reader is a T-shirt-clad woman with green hair, her vocals synthesised through the latest text-to-speech technology?

Let us introduce you to Ananova, the virtual newsreader who fronts the new Website for the company of the same name. (Ananova Ltd was formerly known as Press Association New Media.) This, of course, means that rather than being the flesh and bone norm, she instead consists of a digital wireframe animation, on top of which is layered texture and bump maps. Her emotional understanding and capacity to respond to stories is dependent on XML tags attached to news bulletin scripts. However, be that as it may, she is nevertheless strangely alluring.

HER STORY

Ananova was born of a desire to overhaul the way in which PA New Media did business. The company's original purpose was to supply news to various sources all over the Web, but it soon became a first-stop destination for a general public interested in raw news. The company found it needed to find a wider range of news to satisfy this new stream of business. So it was decided that the new site would have more data, unearthed by quicker and smarter search technology.

Publishing director Mark Hird explains: "All this had been going on, and then last year, the bright idea suddenly emerged (from the commercial department) that it's all very well to have this fantastic data and a great system to find it, but wouldn't it be great if we had something a little more friendly in front of it?"

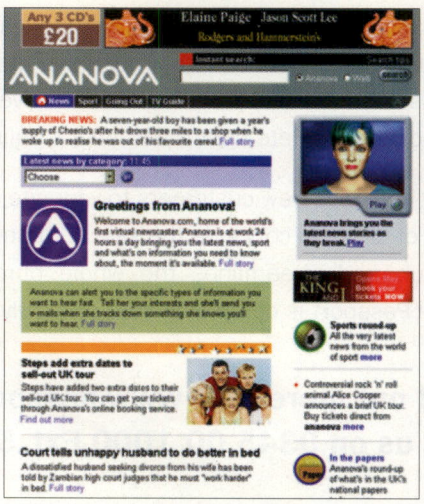
The quest was on to find the 'face' of PA New Media news, and the idea gradually gravitated towards the virtual personality. This broke new ground for the company's creative wing.

"From a design perspective, it's one of the biggest challenges we've ever had to face," recounts creative director Mark Spanton. "Unlike trying to design a traditional Website, you're basically trying to create a personality."

PERSONALITY AND POISE

The team set out to invent a character that was approachable and attractive, yet credible enough to be believed. They all agreed that the virtual person would have to be particularly distinctive. Early stages even involved photographs being torn out from glossy magazines and stuck on a wall, with an invitation to members of staff to comment on which images they found visually interesting and why.

Once the initial attributes had been finalised, the arduous process began of bringing the character to life. For this purpose, Digital Animations Group, a Scottish firm with a pedigree in games development, was chosen to produce wireframe models. Texture maps were then added to these, which included Ananova's distinguishing facial features, including lips, teeth, hair and eyes. Facial muscle structures and pores were also


Any 3 CD's £20
Elaine Paige Jason Scott Lee
Rodgers and Hammerstein's
ANANOVA
News
Sport
Going Out
TV Guide
BREAKING NEWS: A seven-year-old boy has been given a year's supply of Cheerio's after he drove three miles to a shop when he woke up to realise he was out of his favourite cereal. Full story
Latest news by category:
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Ananova can alert you to the specific types of information you want to hear fast. Tell her your interests and she'll send you e-mails when she tracks down something she knows you'll want to hear. Full story
Steps add extra dates to sell-out UK tour
Steps have added two extra dates to their sell-out UK tour. You can get your tickets through Ananova's online booking service.
Find out more
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Formerly PA New Media, Ananova aims to bring you highly personalised news as it breaks.

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ANANOVA
BREAKING NEWS: Eighteen Turkish youths suspected of involvement in the deaths of two Leeds United fans have been formally charged in court. Full Story
Football
Choose a division
Choose a team
Premiership
League News
Southgate stays on the sidelines
Armstrong set to call it a day
Poyet praying for cup final appearance
Spurs fans in 'Graham out' jibes
Will Smith online for BOOKS
Sports round-up
In the papers
SIMPLY RED

If you ask her nicely, Ananova will send you alerts about significant stories specified on the site.

considered in order to make the model as identifiably human as possible. It was during this phase of the project development that some of the more defining features took shape.

"The green hair actually came about as part of that process," explains Spanton. "We needed to give her something distinctive at all sizes. If you imagine her on a screen which is at a very large size and you take her down to one that is palm-sized, it's a feature that can contain that particular look and act as sort of a brand signature. So that's what we did. We introduced the green hair at various sizes, various styles, until we ended up with what we have now."

AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE

Ananova is a fully automated affair; the virtual presenter's every move and sound comes from a set of designed movements which are triggered by both XML scripts and presets programmed by Digital Animations Group. Her voice is entirely automated as well. Her scripts are typed and 'output' to her for reading. Nothing is recorded, synched, or animated. Instead, Larnout and Hauspie (L&H), based in Massachusetts, USA, provides a voice engine by way of its *RealSpeak* text-to-speech product. With *RealSpeak*, whatever you type, Ananova will say it – with a little help from her friendly neighbourhood phoneme library.

Ananova learns how to pronounce strange words from her content team. New words are spelled as they should be, and broken down into phonetic syllables. She's also trained to recognise

FACT FILE

Site: Ananova.com
Parent company: Press Association
Designers: In house, Digital Animation Group
Purpose: Personalised news service with a virtual presenter
Launch date: 19 April 2000 – updates ongoing
Technology: *XML*, *LightWave 3D*, Dialog *Muscat*, L&H *RealSpeak*, and plenty of proprietary programs
Development time: One year

abbreviations like 'Mr' and 'Mrs', as well as context. She can, for example, differentiate between 'St Ramsey' and 'Ramsey St', pronouncing the former as 'saint' and the latter as 'street'. Now and then, though, the technology outfoxes even the cleverest intentions, as project implementation team manager Jonathan Jowitt recalls.

"We were having trouble with the word 'Pokemon', so we put it in as 'Poka' and 'Mon'. She ended up saying 'Pokemonday'!"

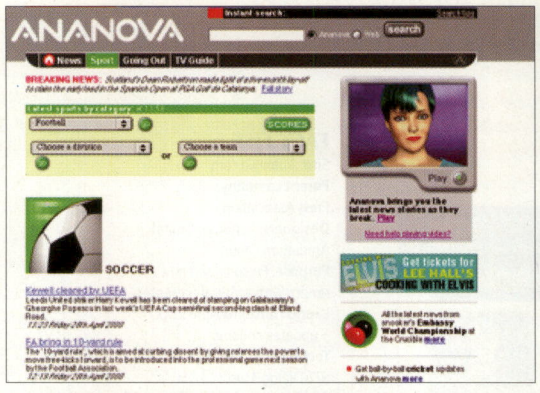
There's also the importance of tone, because the written and spoken word are two very different creatures. As Ananova is intended as a personable non-person, it's important for the company's journalists to adopt a certain writing style.

Daniel James, head of content at Ananova, spells it out: "We're trying to use a slightly different style for the stories we write ourselves, to eliminate the 'journalese' or jargon that you can get in a lot of newspapers and so on. It's probably closer to the way in which people write email."

BODY TALK

There will soon be improvements to Ananova's speech synthesis, and to her body language too. Jonathan predicts hand gestures before long and, as bandwidth improves, you can expect to see more of her body. Fashion designers are keen to design a wardrobe for her, and, gasp, approaches have even been made by record companies. Luckily, though, Ananova hasn't been programmed to sing or rap, ➤

Ananova is able to exhibit a wide range of emotions and movements. Turn the page to see how.



Personalisation is key to Ananova.com. Before long, you'll be able to tailor the alerts you receive, enabling you to keep tabs on your favourite footie team's progress, for example.

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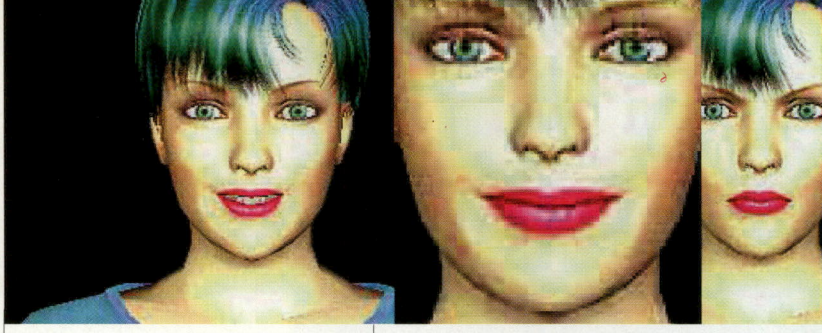
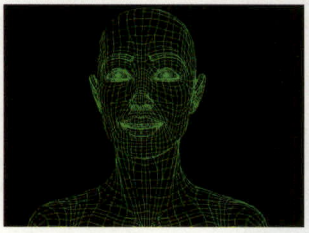


FROM MUSE TO THE NEWS

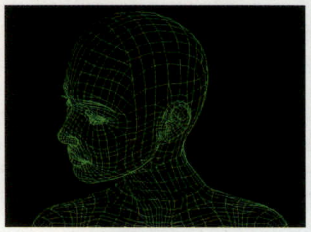
SHE MAY BE A CREDIBLE AND YET FUNKY CYBERBABE, BUT PUTTING THE SITE TOGETHER TOOK ABOUT 12 MONTHS, FROM CONCEPTION TO PRESENT INCARNATION. HERE ARE SOME OF THE DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS



_1 THE IDEA

The design of Ananova began with the creative team at the Press Association. The idea was to create a personable, distinctive character that would be instantly recognisable. Once the first designs had been agreed, Digital Animation Group (DAG) was brought in to make the plans a reality.

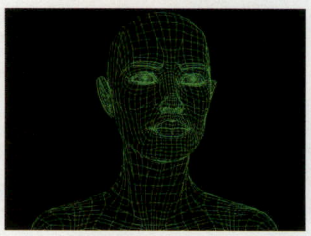
DAG created a wireframe model using a number of proprietary software tools and *LightWave 3D*. Ananova began life as a large, computer-generated 3D gridded cube, which was then stretched and pulled into shape by DAG specialists. Just like the bone and muscle that defines a human face, the wireframe model eventually came to underlie Ananova's cheekbones, brow, chin and so on. More mesh details were added at a later stage, such as eyelashes, hair, teeth, gums, eyebrows – and even a tongue.



_2 THE SKIN

Once the facial structure had been finalised, texture maps were overlaid. One layer defined skin colour and general details such as hair colour, lip colour and shape, plus eye colour. A bump map added minute details like pores, wrinkles and dimples, while another added lighting effects. Now, when she speaks, Ananova's whole face stretches and shrinks with each syllable, giving her a more human appearance than if her lips simply formed word shapes.

By allowing for features such as wrinkles and dimples, the final product has greater scope to exhibit signs of a personality: everyone has his or her unique features when he or she smiles or frowns, and Ananova is no exception.

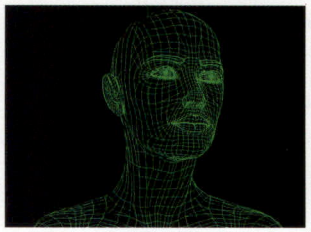


_3 THE ANIMATION

After the wireframe modelling and texture mapping, it was time for animation. The team set to work on translating word sounds, or phonemes, into mouth movement. DAG also animated Ananova's face to make sure it moved correctly. It was all coordinated so that the right

set of movements corresponded with the right set of sounds, all in the correct order.

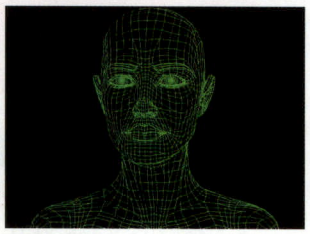
DAG also developed a series of preset gestures to heighten her human qualities. This gesturing included blinking, breathing and nodding; a crucial factor here is that the Website's coders need add none of these gestures to their scripting instructions when marking up text. DAG programmed her eyes to express confidence. Also, legend has it that she has ten different smiles. Count them if you like.



_4 THE LINK UP

Once the bits and pieces had been put together, the major task was then to marry her up to her related technology, and get her on to the Web page. This entailed making sure that her lip movements matched Lernout and Hauspie's *RealSpeak* speech-to-text system (www.lhsl.com), and that all her programmable body movement matched her facial gestures. Ultimately, there was rigorous testing and tweaking to ensure everything went according to plan.

DAG's renderer enables Ananova's face to be redrawn instantly for each facial shape, so that when a story is written and tagged, a simple push of a button feeds it to the virtual presenter. Within seconds, the story can be read out loud, complete with facial expression and body movement.

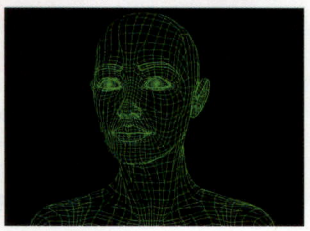


_5 THE STRANDS

Ananova comprises more than just a virtual news reader. There's also a Website, complete with links and a search and alert system, as well as an underlying database. These disparate strands required a level of project management, and sometimes the team simply had to 'wing it', as Jonathan Jowitt, project implementation team manager, explains:

"We did use traditional project management techniques – mini-milestones and testing processes to see whether things worked and so on – but there were also days when it was just seat of the pants stuff."

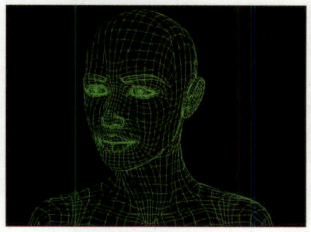
There was also the simple matter of integrating the different engines – those for speech, emotion, gesture and so on – into the Website.



_6 THE INFORMATION

While Ananova reads bulletins, there's also a wealth of information available on the site itself. All that has to be sourced and written, as well as being coded and linked for inclusion on the static Website. Obviously, this had to be designed as well, and it came with its own set of needs. It had to be easy to update, which meant avoiding many of the bells and whistles that accompany many modern Websites. Moreover, with all the bandwidth required for the virtual news reader streams, it was impractical to use a lot of animation such as *Flash*.

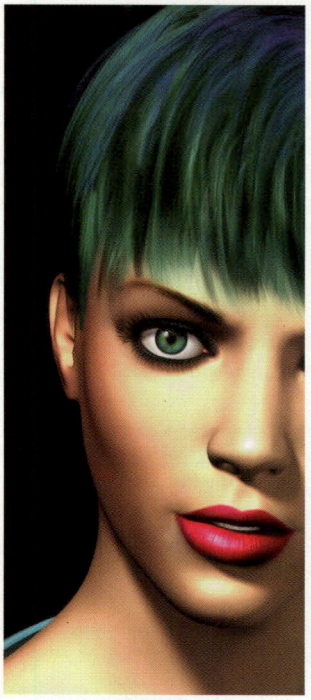
There's also the absence of a menu bar. This is due to the site's constantly changing content, which is up to the second according to the editors at Ananova Ltd.



_7 THE SEARCH

In the world of journalism, sourcing information is tantamount, which is why the Press Association came up with a unique search engine. Part proprietary *Spider* software and part *Muscat* (an indexing tool developed by Dialog), the search engine can be used by everyone – be they PA journalists or members of the public.

The project also stemmed from a frustration born of using other search engines. An organisation that relies on up-to-the minute news cannot afford to have thousands of pages of redundant information dumped on its doorstep with every enquiry. It's real-time and capable of finding highly specific information, and as such fits in with the general ethos of Ananova.



_8 THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

With roughly 1.6 million unique users – people who don't come to the site via a portal – Ananova has picked up considerable traffic.

She still sounds a little robotic, but her text-to-speech software will be upgraded over the course of the year. Do remember, though, that her alerts are streamed video, so your access speed makes a difference.

The alert facility will be beefed up gradually. You'll be able to receive highly personalised alerts – your football team's progress through cup ties, showbiz gossip, even ticket availability to events you might like.

Of course, much of this is part of Ananova's wireless strategy. The company is presently in negotiations with major players in the telecommunications industry. While sources at Ananova are not at liberty to discuss specific details just yet, watch this space for news as it happens. ■

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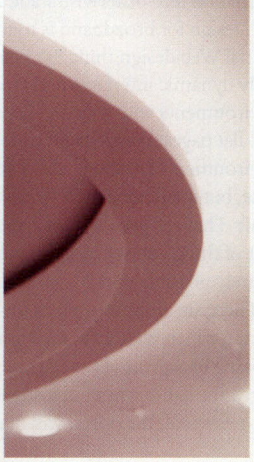


WELCOME

...TO THE FUTURE. WITH INTERACTIVE TV, WAP AND BROADBAND ALL KICKING OFF, DESIGN AGENCIES ARE FACING A FUTURE RICH WITH CREATIVE POSSIBILITIES

Everything is changing. Admittedly, this is par for the course in the Web industry, where a state of flux is about as stable as it gets. Even so, things are currently being shaken up like never before. After years of excitable theorising about new technologies and mediums, they're seemingly ready for take-off, and all at the same time.

Much has been written about broadband Net access, WAP and interactive TV from the consumer's point of view – some of it accurate, much of it wildly misplaced. But what does it mean for creatives? This is the question being posed at agencies, whose business depends on an ability to anticipate trends and then find the people and technology to harness them.

Selecting the three important trends to focus on in this opening issue was easy; deciding how to treat them was not. Covering each in the depth they deserve could easily fill a whole issue twice over. Instead, we picked a single interviewee for each topic – someone we felt was qualified to present an authorative opinion on each subject, and act as a touchstone for debate. They haven't got all the answers, but they are experts in their field.

For broadband, it was perhaps fortunate that while this launch issue of create was coming together, BT unveiled its broadband rollout. As design and navigation manager in charge of BT's new broadband portal, Gary Mortensen-Barker offers a unique take on the implications for designers (p52). Meanwhile, the Open interactive TV service has stormed out of the blocks since its launch last October, although its 'Walled garden' approach has excited much debate within the Web industry. As product development director, Paula Byrne knows Open, and interactive TV, both inside and out (p56).

As regards WAP, we could have chosen any of the major manufacturers to talk to. We decided on Nokia's Bob Brace after he impressed us at a chance meeting with his vision for the future and his balanced perspective on what it all means for designers (p54).

Predicting the future is a risky business, and in the absence of an in-house Oracle, we looked to a trio of design professionals to offer their slant on how the Web will develop in the next five years. As one of the men behind Ananova, DAG's Laurie McCulloch is well-placed to dream about the future for virtual characters (p66), while BlackID's Gordon Black gives us his take on the future for branding and user interfaces (p58). Finally, Brian Cookman offers his perspective on how the influx of traditional print designers will affect Web design (p74).

Web-on-TV has had a bad press, but it's poised to come into its own with the new generation of consoles and set-top boxes. We've asked the experts how design for the TV differs from the PC (p70) and discuss future trends and technologies. But what will the Web studio of the future look like? You'll find one view on p60, complete with a guess at the professionals who will be working in it.

Finally, we've rounded up six industry talents to discuss where we're heading, how we're getting there, and what lies along the way. See what they had to say on p78.

HAVE YOUR SAY
We want to know what you think, which is why we're providing bulletin boards on our site (www.createonline.co.uk). We'll be following up reactions in future issues.

BROADBAND so long world wide wait

WITH THE IMMINENT LAUNCH OF BT'S BROADBAND SERVICES, THE POTENTIAL FOR WEB CREATIVES SEEMS IMMENSE. WE ASK BT'S GARY MORTENSEN-BARKER WHAT ITS IMPACT WILL BE ON WEB DESIGN

BT Internet's Gary Mortensen-Barker, jumping on the bandwidth.

Finally, it's here. After BT's broadband trial last year, the broadcast and Web communities alike have been waiting for the services to be rolled out for real. It may have taken longer than some anticipated, but in a matter of weeks the ADSL-based service will be up and running, available to an estimated 30 per cent of the population.

Unsurprisingly, a lot of the mainstream press coverage focused its attention on the benefits broadband will bring to consumers and businesses. But what about the impact on Web creatives? If it lives up to expectations, broadband looks like it may finally allow them to unleash their imaginations, unfettered by bandwidth restrictions. At least, this is the view of Gary Mortensen-Barker, design and navigation manager at BT Internet and eBusiness.

Sure, you might think, he's paid to say that sort of thing. But his background in Web design and Web marketing means he can offer a strong perspective on how broadband is likely to affect the average designer. What's more, his current position – overseeing the design and content of the BTopenworld broadband portal – gives him a unique view of the pros and cons of broadband.

Aimed at both consumers and businesses, the BTopenworld service is being rolled out in three stages over the next six months. (It's also launching a broadband business portal simultaneously.) When phase one kicks off in July, it will offer users 512Kbps USB Internet access (256Kbps upstream). Phase two, scheduled for the autumn, will offer faster connections and a greater number of e-commerce and teleworking services. Finally, at the end of the year phase three will introduce a Personal openworld Portal (PoP) for every user, allowing access to broadband services through a variety of mediums, including PC, interactive TV and wireless. There will also be a richer set of content and TV-based services.

"BROADBAND IS ABOUT BEING ABLE TO CREATE TRULY DYNAMIC INTERFACES AND CREATE FREER ENVIRONMENTS WITH A SENSE OF SPACE"

NO DAMP SQUIB

For most designers, broadband promises to remove the barriers that have hampered their creativity in the past. "Up until now, design for the Web has been a bit disappointing," says Mortensen-Barker. "We've all been suffering with postage stamp-sized graphics and video, and most pages have had to be totally static."

In the past, this hasn't gone down too well with Internet users who, having been led to expect great things of the Web, found only disappointment. Mortensen-Barker cites the example of a Fiat advert a few years ago which showed a couple of kids looking at a car Website. "It had full-screen, full-motion video, 3D walkarounds and stuff like that," he remembers. "People went away thinking you really could do that. Of course, at the time you couldn't, and people's expectations were set unreasonably high. The technology is only just catching up with expectations of what it should be able to do."

So, what excitement lies ahead for designers working on broadband sites – the majority of which, for the moment, will form part of BT's openworld portal? Mortensen-Barker is looking beyond merely incorporating extra video and animation into otherwise static 2D pages.

"Design for broadband is much more of a spatial Web design thing. It's being able to create truly dynamic interfaces and create freer environments with a sense of space, rather than just flat pages. We've had the idea of 3D virtual environments knocking about for quite a long time, but in all honesty it's been a bit of a damp squib. I haven't seen it done well, except for the sort of thing you see in the Trocadero. But it's entirely possible now."

There are ambitious plans for BT's broadband portal, which is likely to incorporate dynamic moving backgrounds, video and lots of audio. In fact, although it wasn't in evidence at the launch of openworld, the portal will make use of sound

within the interface itself, with plenty of ambient background sound to create a more immersive experience. It's not that there aren't already Websites out there using audio as part of the experience – there are. It's just that in Mortensen-Barker's vision of the future, broadband will render sound as essential to Websites as it is for film – another medium that used to be silent.

THE PRESSURE DROP

One fear that's already been expressed is that the increased bandwidth offered by broadband will encourage designers to cram every bell and whistle into their sites, simply because they can. "There's definitely pressure to include, for example, video on every Web page," says Mortensen-Barker. "We did that on our demo of the openworld portal, but on the actual service we'll only be using it when appropriate."

Instead, he believes the pressure on designers is likely to come from advertising types eager to make their ads stand out. In a medium where video and sparkling animation will be commonplace, how will Websites successfully incorporate all-singing, all-dancing ads with their content? "If you thought banner ads were irritating, how much more irritating will video be?" wonders Mortensen-Barker.

"As a designer, I'm trying to get across the idea that there's an opportunity here to do something more interesting. It doesn't have to be a cheesy advert. There's more scope to produce an ad that's useful and entertaining, as well as innovative. I reckon it will all sort itself out in the end though."

Enough about the look and feel of sites, how will broadband affect the actual content? As far as BT is concerned, sites will need to focus on 'stickiness' if they are to succeed in the broadband environment. Research from last year's BT ADSL trial indicates that consumers are prepared to spend up to four times as much time online every week using their broadband connection, mainly because it's always on and they pay a flat rate for the connection. The result? Web designers will have to focus on creating content that will hold users' attention and keep them coming back.

"Stickiness starts to become important because the advertising revenues for e-commerce become that much bigger," says Mortensen-Barker. "What's more, the ways of doing e-commerce become much more interesting too."

THE BENEFITS OF BROADBAND

The introduction of video-on-demand, for example, will only be part of the desktop ADSL service when BT deem it to be truly valuable. "Short movies, interactive movies, interactive kids' cartoons and movie trailers are absolutely targeted at the desktop PC, and in some cases will be aimed at next-generation portable devices," says Mortensen-Barker. "However, we believe feature-length movies and programmes will be accessed through broadband set-top boxes of the type that BT Openworld and BT Yes TV are already deploying."

So, applications and content will be streamed to whichever platform suit them most. The quoted example from Mortensen-Barker is a consumer who views a trailer on their wireless device or computer can then bookmark it, and this enables them to watch the full film or programme later on at home on their TV. "The strength of the medium is the ability to be used across the different devices in useful ways."

In his role of design and navigation manager, user interfaces is, of course, one area that Mortensen-Barker is particularly concerned about. He believes broadband will enable designers to refine their user interfaces to build something much more intuitive than has been possible before. "Up until now, bandwidth restrictions have meant we've had to rely on interfaces that involved clicking on hyperlinks and fake buttons.

"It won't be long before we can abandon that and do whatever we like. Navigation is really important, not only because it needs to be easy, but because it needs to free you up. The word intuitive has been used for a long time now, but people don't always think what it really means. It doesn't just mean that it's easy to move around a site, it means it comes naturally. There's nothing natural about channels and fake buttons."

For the moment, BT's broadband portal will rely on the channel model for guiding users around the service, but it's clear that Mortensen-Barker and the other creatives on the team are already looking to the next level. Initially, most consumers will equate broadband with faster Web access and richer content. Eventually though, it seems that the very experience of using the Web will be radically changed by its arrival on the scene.

"At the end of the day, Web design isn't just about looking pretty," says Mortensen-Barker. "It's got to be navigable, and we're always looking at ways to improve that. We may even lose the browser altogether! We're certainly working on it, or at least on having our own browser that's invisible. That kind of stuff, really."

BT's broadband offering is undeniably mightily impressive. And on this evidence, we can't wait to see what comes next. ■

W: **www.bt.co.uk/openworld**

TEXT: **STUART DREDGE** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **JAMIE BEEDEN**

Nokia's Bob Brace: "If you wait for the demand, someone else will be there before you and get the market share."

WAP on the move

IF THE PACE OF CHANGE IN THE WAP ARENA HAS GOT YOU CONFUSED, DON'T WORRY. EVEN EXPERTS LIKE NOKIA'S BOB BRACE SOMETIMES STRUGGLE TO KEEP UP

The times, they are a changing. And how. The unrelenting progress of wireless application protocol (WAP) over the last six months has left even the telecommunications experts stranded adrift in the information overload. It seems that barely a day has gone by without some new WAP announcement or high profile conference.

There's no doubt that WAP is figuring high on the priority list for new media agencies right now. Those that haven't already got WAP sites up and running are in the development process. And if they're not already doing that, they're seriously looking into it. And if they're not doing that, well, they're looking rather worried.

Even the vice president of channel marketing at mobile giant Nokia, Bob Brace, admits that keeping up with the pace of WAP can sometimes be a struggle. Since the launch of its 7110 WAP phone, Nokia has been shifting boxes at an impressive rate, reportedly even having to scramble to cope with the demand.

Whereas WAP was once merely a buzzword among Internet professionals, it's now on the lips of mainstream consumers. It's a hot area of interest for Web designers too.

EARLY ADOPTERS

Although WAP has garnered plenty of publicity in recent months, the technology is still perceived as one for early adopters only. The high price and comparative scarcity of WAP-enabled phones means that for the moment, most WAP users fall into the business category.

The result is a perception by many Web developers that WAP is currently only suitable for business-based applications such as stocks and shares and travel. Not so, argues Brace.

"Like any new technology, there are a lot of early adopters," he says. "However, there's no doubt that others will follow." Nokia's own research claims that by 2005 there will be as many as one billion mobile phone users worldwide, roughly half of which are likely to be WAP-enabled. There's no denying it's a sizeable market.

Nokia's view is that instead of writing off WAP as a businessman's toy, Web developers should look at its potential as a business-to-consumer tool. The key is its mobility. "It doesn't matter where the user is. You can use SMS technology to push a message to them, and they can then log on via their phone to carry out an action. If you were to do the same thing using email, nothing would happen until they logged on to pick up new messages."

In other words, although this is a perfect fit for financial applications, WAP also suits any application that needs to be available to people on the move. News, travel, weather and similar services can all benefit from WAP.

But it's localised Web services that can reap the real potential. For example, Upmystreet.com, which offers a wealth of local information, is licking its lips at the prospect of WAP users who find themselves in unfamiliar cities.

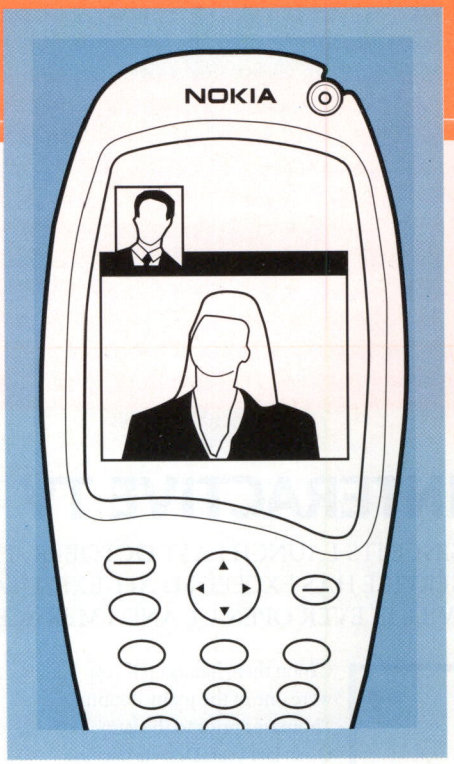
YOUNG GUNS

If the current perception of WAP is that of a toy for city boys, Brace believes that will soon change, heralding a move to the mass-market. Perhaps surprisingly, he believes that the youth market will be the next to get into WAP.

"BT Cellnet has just launched a pay-as-you-go WAP phone that's certain to appeal to the teenage market," says Brace. "After all, it's the teenagers who go for this sort of new technology."

The BT Cellnet phone was launched at the start of April with the aim of attracting the mass market. The relatively low startup cost of just under £100 means that WAP technology is now available to consumers who are looking to use it for more than purely business. According to Brace, the result will be a demand for services that have been ignored until now, one which targets teens, women and older users.

"WAP IS SOMETHING THAT DESIGNERS NEED TO BE INVOLVED IN NOW IF THEY'RE TO MAKE THE MOST OF 3G WHEN IT HAPPENS"



But as many developers have already discovered, taking a Website on to WAP isn't a simple task. "It's an extension of what they're already doing, but they need to be aware of the limitations of the platform," says Brace. "You have to concentrate on building applications for WAP, rather than trying to just port across Web applications."

Brace admits that not all developers are getting the message. He cites the example of WAP sites that have been built without 'Back' buttons, simply because designers were so used to them being part of Web browsers.

However, the developers aren't entirely to blame. Tools for WAP development have been few and far between, and there are precious few information resources to help designers get to grips with the new environment. Although Brace accepts that the situation is far from perfect, he maintains that it is changing.

"There has been a lack of development tools, but that's getting better. You can now download our WAP server and SDK toolkit, while packages like *Dreamweaver* are offering WAP plug-ins."

The other main movers in the WAP scene, Ericsson and Motorola, are doing likewise and their development kits are now freely available online. In a sense, WAP is currently a developers' market. Brace agrees that if the manufacturers are to continue selling phones at a healthy rate, there needs to be as much content as possible out there.

PLATFORM ANTICS

Despite the efforts of the WAP Forum (the industry body set up to establish global standards), the other WAP drawback often cited by peeved developers is the problem of developing sites that run equally well across all the different platforms. At the moment, designers are understandably frustrated by the fact that phones all handle WML script in different ways. Brace concedes that there is work to be done, but for now it seems developers will have to continue using stringent testing procedures to ensure their sites are accessible to all.

Finally, there's the thorny issue of promotion. At the moment, developers are experiencing problems driving WAP users towards their sites. It's cumbersome to type in long (or even short) URLs on a WAP phone, so the majority of users rely on the links provided on the portal of their phone's provider – for example, Orange. Developers whose sites don't make it on to the portals are then left in limbo – a situation Nokia claims will soon be rectified. "We're working on a development of our OTA tool to give sites some marketing impetus," says Brace.

"From a designer's point of view, it will mean they can set up a button on their Website that enables users to enter their GSM number. The software then sends a special SMS to the user's phone, which can then be saved to allow the user to access the site without going through a portal."

It's simple enough, but it shows that companies like Nokia are willing to listen to the concerns of WAP developers in order to ensure a healthy supply of content for their customers. WAP is currently a predominantly text-based medium, which may impede some artsy design-types. But, says Brace: "Your only limit is your imagination," and it should be treated as a challenge rather than as a limitation. He agrees that the future holds bigger and better things, not least of which 3G, the third generation of WAP devices.

"There's no doubt that 3G is going to be very exciting," says Brace. Nokia's Website already has pictures up of prototype 3G appliances that are capable of receiving better images and even video. However, he counsels against designers waiting for this swish broadband technology to enter the wireless arena. "WAP is something that they need to be involved in now if they're to make the most of 3G when it happens."

Nokia also has exciting plans for WAP as an e-commerce application, with phones that not only enable consumers to connect to sites, but also to pay for goods and services. "The mobile phone has the potential to become a trust device," says Brace. "Consumers will be able to store their credit card details on their phone, rather than laboriously tap in the number."

THE TIME IS NOW

So why should Web developers launch WAP projects now – why not wait for the market to mature a little? Brace believes in seizing the day. "Getting in now is essential for any Web developer who wants to be able to follow the development of WAP," he says.

"For developers who wait a couple of years, it's going to be a lot harder. Now's the opportunity to get in there. If you can come up with a killer idea, it's very easy to establish a strong brand."

It's reminiscent of the Web a few years back, when early birds like Amazon and Yahoo nipped in and established commanding online brands while their bricks and mortar rivals hesitated. Brace believes the same could now happen to unwary Websites. "If you wait for the market to be there, someone else will be in before you and they'll get the market share."

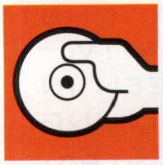
And then there's the States, where the WAP market is considerably less developed than in Europe – a fact that was openly acknowledged at the Internet World show in LA. But Brace believes the lag can only benefit European Web developers who take the plunge into WAP development now.

"WAP devices will appear in the States later this year, so it's another opportunity for developers to get in there early," he says. "Once they've got to grips with the European market, they'll be well prepared to compete in the US market."

In other words, there's no time like the present. Naturally, that's what you'd expect a manufacturer like Nokia to say – after all, it's vital for the company's business plan that there's plenty of WAP content available. Put simply, they need you, and you could do very well out of them.

It's a real chicken and egg situation, but bearing in mind the way Web people are taking to WAP development, it seems nobody wants to be labelled a chicken. Watch this space? You betcha. ■

w: **www.nokia.com/corporate/wap/**
w: **www.btcellnet.co.uk**
TEXT: **STUART DREDGE** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **JAMIE BEEDEN**



ON THE CD

We've managed to secure a free trial version of Nokia's WAP server that will save you the trouble of a lengthy download. There's also a host of useful WAP development tools and testing software to ensure your WAP site works across all platforms. For more information, see p34.

INTERACTIVE TV open sesame?

SINCE ITS LAUNCH LAST OCTOBER, THE OPEN INTERACTIVE TV SERVICE HAS EXCEEDED ALL EXPECTATIONS. THE QUESTION IS, WILL IT EVER OPEN UP AND EMBRACE THE INTERNET?

Open's Paula Byrne: "We assume no knowledge of computers – it's designed so your mum can use it."

"PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS OF THEIR TV – IT'S BEEN IN THEIR LIVING ROOM FOREVER. THEY TRUST IT IN A WAY THEY DON'T TRUST THE INTERNET"

C'mon then, hands up if you were one of the many doubting Thomases prior to the launch of Open last year. Despite backing from the likes of BSkyB and BT, the interactive TV (or iDTV) service faced considerable cynicism from within the Web industry.

Even so, Open has elicited a lot of interest from the Web design community, with many agencies diversifying into interactive TV design as their clients demand it. Agencies like pres.co and Workhouse have led the way in taking their new media skills onto television, with more to follow.

As product development director at Open, Paula Byrne probably knows more than anyone else about the service. She's been in charge of its content since the very early days, following on from her role in charge of BT's interactive TV trial in 1995, which wired up 2,500 homes in Colchester and Ipswich.

In terms of content development, Open functions rather like a big Web agency. "We've got service developers, designers, editorial people and email experts," she says. "It's a real melting pot, as we've had to bring in people from a variety of backgrounds – Web, print, video games and so on."

Open's stats so far are impressive, to say the least. The service is available to around 3 million SkyDigital customers, with research indicating that 45 per cent of them are accessing Open at least once a week for at least 15 minutes at a time. In the run-up to Christmas, the service was taking a cool million pounds worth of orders every week. Nice.

AUDIENCE FOCUS

Open's success in enticing retailers and Websites onto the platform rests on the uniqueness of its audience, which has a very different profile to the average Web user. "We genuinely are mass market," says Byrne. "70 per cent of our audience are families, and it's not just a case of the dads using us. It's the mums, the teenagers – even the grannies!"

It's this family-orientated demographic that's helped to persuade big high street brands like Woolworths, Asda and Dixons to make the leap onto iDTV much faster than they did with the Web. Byrne also believes that the high proportion of female users offers something that the Internet is still struggling to do.

"Women tend to feel a lot more comfortable with it," she says. "Our split is roughly 50/50 male and female, which is different to the Internet." Attracting female browsers is a hot issue for many Websites, so it's no surprise that Open is winning friends in the business community with this mix.

It's not just bricks'n'mortar brands that have been flocking to the Open service either. Websites like Gameplay, Toyzone, Yalplay and Boxman have all made the jump onto the TV screen. According to Byrne, they've met with great success.

"They haven't come in with the years of brand history that people like Woolworths have, but they've been hungry to seize the opportunity to get their brand in front of a new audience."

The companies in question back up her claim, with strong sales making the move to iDTV worthwhile. Gameplay is reportedly now making half its online income through Open, for example.

LOST IN THE TRANSLATION

For agencies looking to take Web clients into the interactive TV space, it's been a steady learning curve. "When we started, we had a lot of retailers who'd say 'I'm doing this on my Website, so how can I do it on Open?' It's an easy question to answer," says Byrne.

That said, she claims that creating Open services isn't as complicated as many Web designers expect. "After all, if your pictures and images are already digitally encoded, it's just a matter of laying them out a different way. It's not the big thing a lot of people seem to think it is."

Although the last two statements may seem contradictory, Byrne's view is that technically, taking a Website onto Open is a simple task. However, it's the attitude shift needed that takes time and effort, ensuring that the new service is optimised for the needs of TV viewers rather than Web users.

If there's a buzz phrase at Open, it's 'Ease of Use'. By assuming the lowest common denominator about its users' technical knowledge, the service is designed to make sure every element of its diverse audience feels at home.

MAKE IT EASY

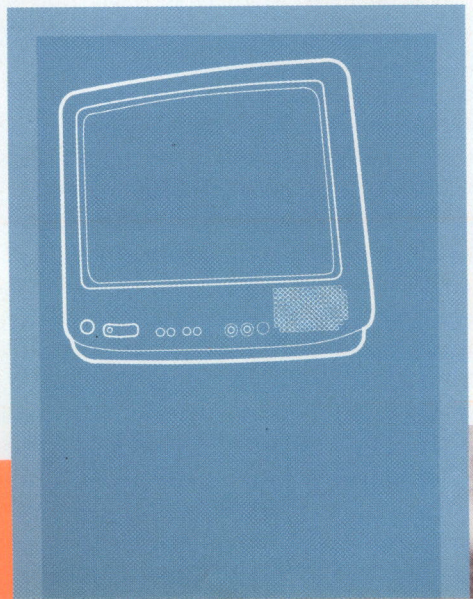
"We assume no knowledge of computers – in fact, we assume that they're technophobic," says Byrne. "We assume they've used a remote control to switch channels, but equally that they probably have trouble tuning or setting their video. Basically, it's designed for my mum: if she can cope with it, anyone else can."

This focus on ease of use means that more importance is placed on easy navigation around the Open service. The company operates strict quality control procedures to ensure that every individual site under its umbrella not only fits well with the Open brand, but also leads users through without losing them along the way.

"We learned a lot on the BT interactive TV trial about what works with customers and what doesn't," says Byrne. "We've applied that to all the services we've built here. I'm confident that we've hit the right level of navigation for people."

While Web agencies may grumble about Open's strict controls, they all admit that the results are effective, visually attractive and inately televisual. And of course, your mum can use them.

Among the Web community, the most controversial aspect of Open is its 'walled garden' approach to the Internet. Rather than offer its customers full access to the Web, Open restricts them to a set number of sites that have signed commercial agreements with the company.



Although some Web professionals have their doubts over this model of iDTV, talk to the agencies and businesses that are working with Open and you hear a different story. According to Byrne, the walled garden approach is currently the only feasible strategy for Open.

"In the early days, we did look at whether we should have full Internet access, but everything we were hearing from potential customers was concerns about how this would affect the TV's status as a secure and trusted environment.

"Parents are concerned about issues like pornography being pumped into their living room, and losing control of what their kids view."

Design issues also figured highly on Open's agenda. Unless every Website could be reauthored, there would be no guarantee sites would be even browsable on the TV screen, let alone look good. "How do you reauthor the entire Internet?" asks Byrne. "Nobody has the answer to that."

FAMILY FRIENDLY

For the moment, the moral issues are more important. Open's commercial success rests on the TV's reputation as a benign family friend. "People have very different expectations of a TV. It's been in their living room forever, so people trust it in a way they don't trust the Internet."

Byrne is backed up by the figures. Recent market research from BMRB claimed that within two months of Open launching last year, a whopping 80 per cent of SkyDigital subscribers had made a purchase from it. In other words, far faster than the Internet, where research indicates that the average user takes six months to dip their toes in the water of e-commerce.

Naturally, services on Open take advantage of this, using push technology more effectively than can be done online. In between screens, users are presented with full-screen splash ads – when the interview took place, mostly for Pokemon.

"You're giving people ideas about what to buy," says Byrne. "People love to be suggested to. On the Web, you assume people know what they want, but that's not always the case."

Of course, how this will change once broadband access is the norm is anyone's guess. For now, though, Open is making the most of its advantage to drive users to put their hands in their wallets. Purist designers might scoff at this naked commercial instinct, but agencies are grasping the potential of Open's iDTV model for e-commerce.

FACING THE FUTURE

So what next? More original content, for starters. "We want the content to always be fresh," says Byrne. "When we launched, many retailers wanted to use video, but often it just involved running their TV ads over and over. That's not a good use of the medium."

Interestingly, it's the companies with Web origins, like Gameplay, who are leading the way in this respect. "It's been treating its quarter screen of video like a TV channel, with new content created every week. I think a lot more companies will start doing this sort of thing."

There's also the much talked about interactive ads, which debuted on SkyDigital with a commercial for 'Chicken Tonight'. Plus, there are plans to move onto other digital platforms as and when it becomes feasible. "We're not platform-specific. We currently run on a satellite platform, but we'd love to be on cable and digital terrestrial," she says. "The customer doesn't care which platform it's on. It's whether the services are useful and enable them to do what they want."

Just one big question remains: despite the current advantages of the walled garden approach, will Open ever become truly 'open' Webwise?

"We never say never to anything," says Byrne. "New media's constantly changing. Once the customer is ready to accept the Internet on TV, and solutions have been found to the technical issues, we'll happily consider it. For the moment though, this is the right way to go." ■

w: **www.open-here.co.uk**

TEXT: **STUART DREDGE** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **JAMIE BEEDEN**

IN FIVE YEARS

brands_on the run

ACCORDING TO GORDON BLACK OF BLACKID, THE NEXT FIVE YEARS WILL SEE CORPORATE BRANDING ON THE WEB BECOME AN INCREASINGLY INTERACTIVE TWO-WAY PROCESS...

The Web is moving from a static HTML-based medium to something far more dynamic, boasting moving images, sound and interactive elements. Technologies like *Flash* and *Shockwave* are enabling designers to unleash their creativity to produce even more compelling content. However, according to BlackID's Gordon Black, these tools won't reach their full potential until broadband access is a reality for the majority of Web users.

Since he founded BlackID, Gordon has seen it evolve into a niche services company focusing on strategy, design and technology. Clients include Burger King, Bacardi and Channel 4, plus a recently-won lucrative contract to work on BT Cellnet's online activities. BlackID prides itself on its expertise in the interactive media design process, from design through to project management and sector-specific knowledge.

INFO DESIGN

One of the company's particular strengths lies in information design, which Black predicts will grow in importance over the next five years.

"It relates to navigation, the information flow and the layout," he says. "Creating a non-linear Website is almost like handing over total control to the user, enabling them to pick the area they want to explore. So, you're going to have to look more at steering users in the direction you want them to go."

Black also believes the 'information designer' will have a greater role to play in Web agencies, as they investigate ways of giving users more freedom without compromising the amount of information they wish to impart. Effective information flow will become as important as slick graphic design, particularly in the corporate sphere.

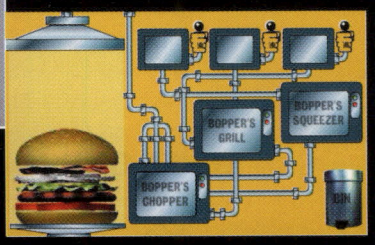
There will also have to be a change in the way sites are navigated – and soon – to take account of user's preferences. "We've seen this pattern emerge where people almost expect navigation to be an upside-down L-shape along the top and down the left-hand side of the screen," he says. "It's already starting to look a bit tired. With *Flash* technologies and other animation tools, you can create a more interesting user experience with more engaging navigation and interaction."

However, designers will have to learn to hold back from overdoing it. "There's no point designing obtuse navigation devices just for the sake of design. You might assume that people are quite happy to go on some kind of exploration, but you've also got to assume that they just want the information as fast as possible. It's a trade-off."

FLASH GORDON

Black estimates that around half of BlackID's current work is *Flash*-related – and that it will increase in the future. "It gives us a lot more creative freedom and it's definitely improving," he stresses. Although the current trend is for dual site development – one *Flash* and one static HTML – it's not a long-term

At Channel 4's site, football fans can play at home and away by participating in a worldwide league.



Burger King's sticky bun: interactive content is a key element – once you've got visitors on to your site, you want them to stay there.

solution, not least because it impacts on the budget available to Web designers. Key to developments in the next five years will be the uptake among consumers. "I think we'll get to the point where everybody will have *Flash*, and the Web will have much more animation and dynamic content."

So, how would he like to see *Flash* develop in the next five years? "I think it's happening already," he says. "A lot of it's coming through with *Flash Generator*, which enables us to update content simply and link it to databases."

However, consumer takeup is definitely Gordon's main concern. "For me, the most important thing is the adoption of the technology from the browser's point of view. I want to see more people using *Flash* Websites. The actual technology itself is coming along very well."

And what should Macromedia be looking to improve? According to Gordon, it's compression. Although broadband Web access is on the way, it will still be some time before the bulk of the UK's online population have truly speedy access to the Internet. If *Flash* content is to take off, Black hopes compression techniques will enable more content to be squeezed onto pages.

"I think it's important we get to the point where we can put more content on a page, without download times slowing the whole thing down," he says. "Pre-broadband, compression is important, as there are still problems concerning the wait for downloads. Designers are often impeded by the slowdown, and although an experienced designer knows what they can and can't do online, someone still has to decide whether users will be prepared to wait for a large file to download."

To this end, BlackID is involved in ongoing research into reducing the file sizes of its online content. Interestingly, some of Black's designers are also using LINGO to pursue a new path in animation. "We're doing some interesting things with animation which may enable users to make changes or be more in control." If *Flash* is at present a passive tool, Black is looking for more customisable animation in the future.

BRAND NEW

One of BlackID's key areas is that of online branding. The company has helped develop a coherent online identity for a number of large offline brands. As regards the future, Black makes it clear that the days of brochureware are well and truly over.

"Passive Websites simply aren't that engaging. Users get bored and move on," he says. "We're committed to producing Websites that create a more engaging and interactive experience, where everything we do is geared towards keeping users on the site longer."

Gordon's view is that in the next five years, concepts like 'stickyness' and 'interactivity' will be even more relevant to strong online branding. Rather than creating glossy display sites for corporate clients, agencies will need to focus more on providing interactive content.

"Once you've got visitors on to your site, it's important to keep them there," he says. "It's absolutely crucial that they interact with the brand and that the brand is promoted in a positive way."

These concepts may not be unfamiliar to today's consumer sites, but it seems corporate sites are set to go the same way. BlackID has already created mini-games for clients like Burger King and Channel 4 to do just that. On the latter, users can play a table football game, based on the channel's Italian football coverage. Their score is then uploaded to a worldwide league table. "It gets people registering and coming back. If you're number one and then some bloke in Italy deposes you, you come back and play again. And all the while, you're being exposed to more branding."

In short, Gordon's view is that online branding will become progressively more interactive and less focused on mere design issues like corporate colours and logos. "Currently, we all look at television advertising as a way of people pushing their brand message across. However, on the Web, if you encourage people to interact with the brand, it's a much more powerful experience."

THE KNOWLEDGE

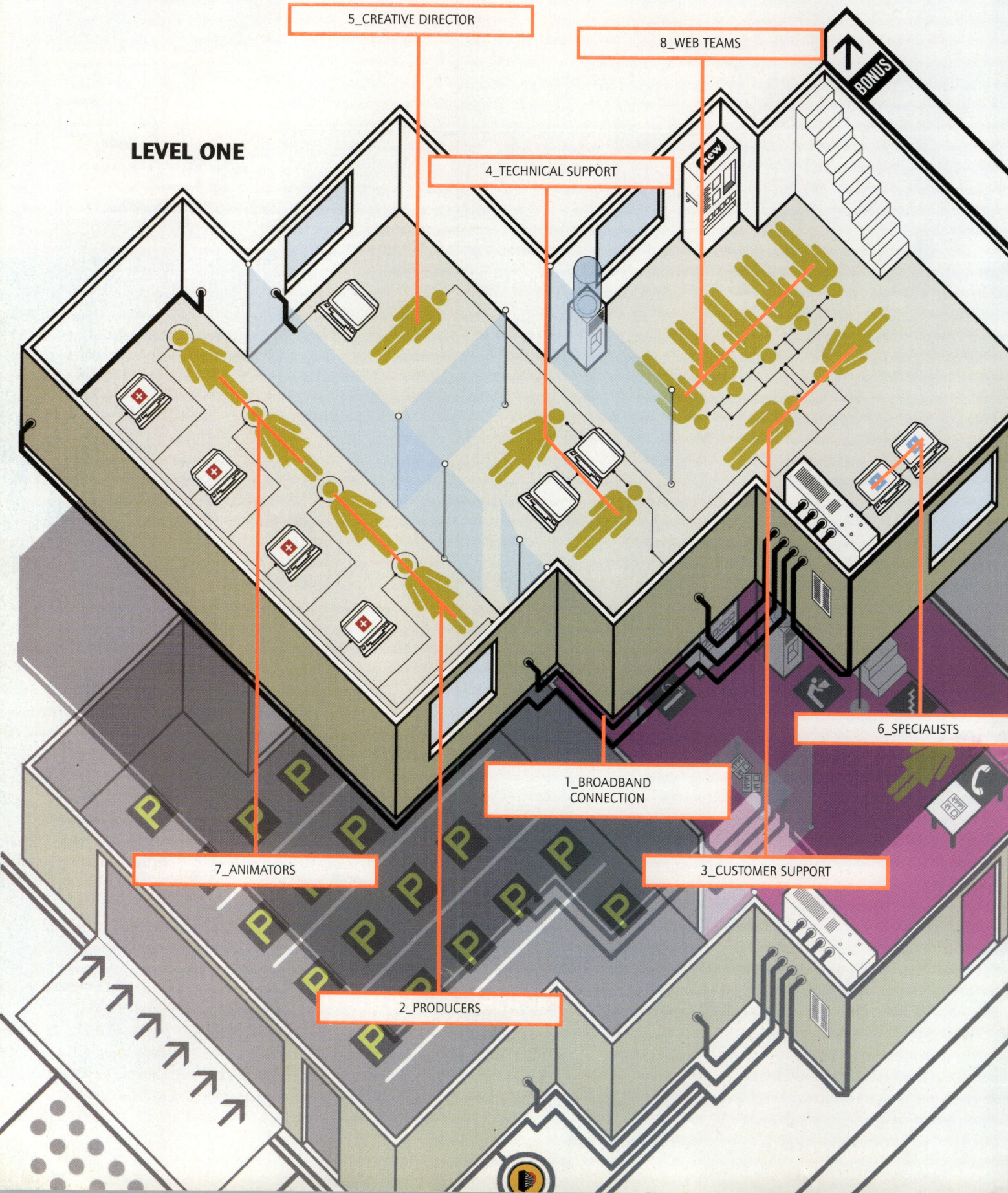
The final trend relates to personnel. As more Web agencies move into the 'niche services' area, experts from outside the Web industry will be in greater demand.

"I think it'll be crucial that you have people who understand the businesses you're dealing with. For example, we operate in three areas – consumer brands, financial services and media/leisure, and we have people at the front end who are experienced in those industries. First and foremost, you've got to understand the business." ■

W: **www.blackid.co.uk**

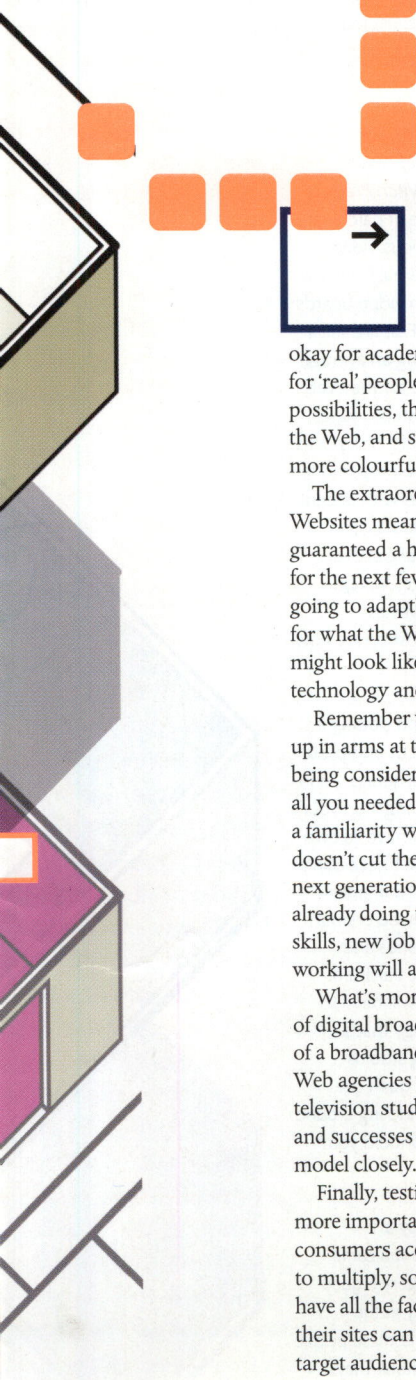
TEXT: **STUART DREDGE** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **JAMIE BEEDEN**

"WITH FLASH TECHNOLOGIES AND OTHER ANIMATION TOOLS, YOU CAN CREATE A MORE INTERESTING USER EXPERIENCE" GORDON BLACK


LEVEL ONE
5_CREATIVE DIRECTOR
8_WEB TEAMS
BONUS
4_TECHNICAL SUPPORT
NEW
6_SPECIALISTS
1_BROADBAND CONNECTION
7_ANIMATORS
3_CUSTOMER SUPPORT
2_PRODUCERS

future dreams

IN THE FUTURE, INTERNET USERS WILL EXPECT A GREAT DEAL MORE THAN JUST GRAPHICS AND TEXT ON THEIR FAVOURITE WEBSITES. BUT HOW WILL THE TYPICAL WEB AGENCY HAVE CHANGED IN ORDER TO COME UP WITH THE GOODS? HERE'S OUR VIEW OF WHAT THE WEB AGENCY OF THE FUTURE MIGHT LOOK LIKE, AND WHO'LL BE WORKING IN IT. AND THAT PROBABLY MEANS YOU



It's difficult to believe that only five years ago, most of the media was pretty cynical about the Internet. It was seen as okay for academics and boffins, but not for 'real' people. Well, once they saw the possibilities, the real people flocked to the Web, and suddenly it's an altogether more colourful place to be.

The extraordinary demand for Websites means that agencies are guaranteed a healthy amount of work for the next few years. So how are they going to adapt? We've pitched our ideas for what the Web agency of the future might look like, both in terms of technology and employees.

Remember when art directors were up in arms at the thought of the Web being considered an art form? Back then, all you needed was a bit of HTML and a familiarity with *Photoshop*. That just doesn't cut the mustard any more – the next generation of Web designers are already doing things differently. New skills, new job titles and new ways of working will all play their part.

What's more, the tremendous growth of digital broadcasting, and the promise of a broadband future mean that many Web agencies will have to learn to be television studios. Quality, staff, skills and successes will all follow the TV model closely.

Finally, testing will become even more important, as the number of ways consumers access the Internet continues to multiply, so agencies will need to have all the facilities in place to ensure their sites can be seen by their entire target audience.

LEVEL ONE

1_BROADBAND CONNECTION

Currently, how you connect to the Internet depends on whether your server sits in-house or in someone else's house. Giving your staff super-fast Web speed can sadly often cause technical headaches, and result in a hefty monthly bill. In the future this will change, as various new connection methods become available.

There's the much-vaunted ADSL, for example (see p15), or even high-speed satellite access – Cidera will soon be launching a system for £200 a month. In the future, here's hoping that pricing and technical issues will be less of a hassle for the average Web agency.

2_PRODUCERS

The producer will continue to function as Everyman. Not only will they be responsible for keeping their fist clamped around the purse strings, but they'll also be required to keep the most objective point of view over the longest time span. Producers will have to cut across the rifts that are currently seen between online and offline. In the future, splitting Web staff from non-digital staff will seem as old-fashioned as working nine-to-five does today.

At least they'll be well remunerated for their efforts. Many people who began as programmers in the mid-90s are now edging their way into management, according to Computer Futures recruitment consultant Spencer Symmons.

"Contractors with Java skills a couple of years ago cost £35 an hour, but now it's up to £90. I've even had people go out at £130 with top strategy and e-commerce skills."

And if you're a bit rusty at maths, that's a cool quarter of a million a year.

3_CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Give punters an inch, and they'll take a mile. You put an email address on your site saying it'll go to a help desk. And then some smart aleck complains because no-one answered his complaint. In the future, customer support will be the single most important factor in a company's success worldwide. Whether you're Sony or Tefal, the quality of customer support will determine how many times they come back.

You may think that being an agency makes you immune. Think again. Your customers are your clients, and they're increasingly likely to come from far corners of the world, and to give your number to their employees to ask questions about the site. Do you want producers being bugged every time someone forgets which button to press on a PC mouse? Investing in a customer service schedule will earn you big brownie points, and is the key to good word of mouth.

4_TECHNICAL SUPPORT

You know the little guy who's always covered in wires? The person you turn to when *Media Cleaner* keeps crashing, or when your Jaz drive is making unhealthy noises? Well, this person will be history. As computers learn to talk to each other, there'll be less need to have someone around whose sole job is to reboot your machine when it dies.

Remote diagnostics promise a world where your computer can tell you there's an impending problem with your digital camera before you even knew. And by the time it tells you, the problem's already been fixed. Don't be too worried if you're currently an IT support bod – the future is ASP, and it's bright, holds more cash and is far better appreciated.

5_CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Creative directors have a whole new ballgame to learn. If you thought the marketing department had their work cut out, wait until you see what the best creative directors can achieve.

"Skills for the future will rest on the ability to manipulate information spaces which themselves compose the Web itself," says Michael Batty, director of the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis at University College in London.

In other words, what you see on the page at any one time will be fluid, changing from one hit to the next – not just in Amazon-like personalisation, but in the composition of the page itself. Thus, the creative director of the future will need to know as much about steering people as they do about luring them.

6_SPECIALISTS

Broadband video, and the host of new networks available, will mean the Web studios of the future will need to employ specialist skills that can handle everything from sending Web pages to cell phones through to fridges and so on.

"In the good old days, HTML and a few graphic design skills were enough to carry you through most jobs," says Planet Recruit co-founder Chris Ford. "Now interim technologies like WAP, while not being so different from traditional Web-based delivery, are different enough for people to specialise. Plus, they can command good money for doing it."

The demise of several Web design houses has shown that specialist skills can't be easily maintained in-house, so the studios of the future are more likely to bring in talent from outside according to the needs of specific projects. The future is freelance, says Ford, who believes that interactive TV will be a particularly fascinating area to watch.

7_ANIMATORS

Animators have an important role to play in the development of the Web. The producer will decide where *Flash* is to be used, but how effective the animation is will be down to individual artists. It's tempting to see the animator's role as aesthetic – even gimmicky. But with high bandwidth creeping along the high street, Web studios will be employing the services of television professionals to cope with genuinely three-dimensional environments. Pixel UK's Dan Mauger believes an explosion in demand for TV-like content on the Web will mean involvement in creation as well as fabrication stages: "Professionals adept in 3D modelling will become more involved in the Web production itself," he stresses.

However, it's unlikely that animation skills alone will guarantee a permanent place in any studio other than those of the most committed games sites.

Planet Recruit's Chris Ford points to an already fragmenting market in which: "People of different skillsets are being brought in on a contract basis for specific jobs". And there's no reason to expect a change in the future.

"Larger UK Web houses have closed down precisely because they could not support in-house skills that are not being employed 24/7," he says.

8_WEB TEAMS

Nothing smells quite like team spirit in the Web world and, says Core Design boss Jeremy Heath-Smith, put a team of people with similar skills together and you've got the recipe for success.

"We group people with the same skillset. Computer designers and traditional animators, maybe, but all animation artists at heart. For instance, for a next-generation game we're working on now, we've got quite a few people who've worked for Crosby the paper animators, plus a couple of ex-Disney animators. They're all making the transition into the computer animation world together."

Teams with similar skills motivate each other. Putting texture designers or coders on a workstation-filled conveyor belt keeps the banter going and the rivalry alive.

"They inspire each other on all sorts of projects," says Heath-Smith. "And this is particularly true as they can now be far more tolerant of the machines. Traditional artists who've always been frustrated at computing power before, can now make the transition much easier into 3D CAD worlds because they're not trying to push that machine as hard as they used to. They don't have to be quite as cautious on things like model building as they did in the good old days."

Give them the computing power and they'll start making their own projects up.

"There's such a variety of projects we're working on now. When we know what we're doing, we have a look around at which artists have the skillsets best suited for that particular project, get them together and get it going."

LEVEL TWO

IT'S PERFECTLY POSSIBLE that Web agencies of the future will have their own fully-functional production studios for creating video, audio and animation content for their Websites. Although not every agency will opt to turn itself into a fully-fledged Webcaster, this is one idea of how they might incorporate technologies that have traditionally been restricted to broadcasters and production houses.

1_EDIT SUITE

Realistically, slipping video onto your sites needn't be any more expensive than authoring another *Blair Witch Project*. However, the future doesn't lie in patching together a PC or Mac with various video cards, Firewire boards and internal hard disk drives. Although the top-notch video boards from the likes of Pinnacle and Fast are still a hair's breadth away from turning an average PC into a TV station, the future for the Web studios is likely to involve DIY studio suites, aided by the fast fall in RAID hard disk prices.

Of course, agencies will have prepared for this by kitting out their creatives with decent editing software, including products like *Premiere*, *SpeedRazor* and *Final Cut Pro*. In years to come, these packages will be as familiar to many Web creatives as *Dreamweaver*, *Flash* and *Photoshop* are now.

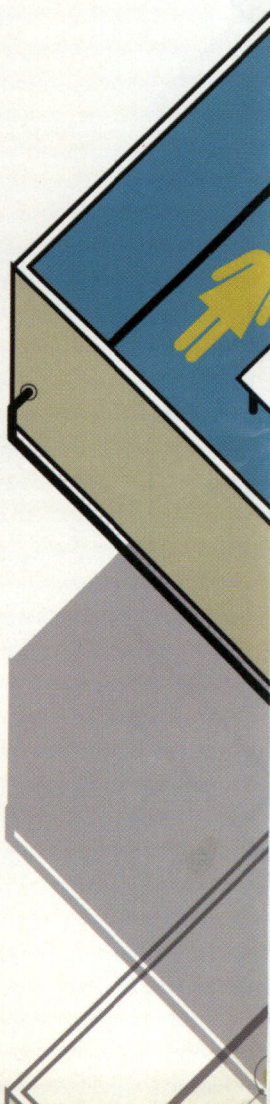
2_AUDIO MIXING DESK

Sampling a quick sound loop and slotting it into a *Flash* movie is as easy as cut-and-paste. But if you're really serious about sound – and you should be if you intend having it on your sites – your studio should really have its own mixing desk in the future. It won't necessarily need to be the sort of thing that'd impress Peter Gabriel, but it'll certainly need enough knobs to enable you to adjust tones and volumes before it hits the public eardrum.

In the future, Web agencies will be using the same sort of technology that's currently restricted to recording studios and broadcasters. After all, you don't see professional audio technicians fiddling around with on-screen sliders, so why should you?

3_A/V EDITOR

Audio and video have to be cut by a professional. Where these people will come from, however, is a complete mystery – good editors are already in short supply in the traditional broadcast industry. And these people won't just be chop-chop-chop editors. They'll know how to operate real-time streaming



software, run live broadcast-quality video in the background of a Web page layer, and be able to step the output according to different reception capabilities of the audience.

What's most likely is that broadcasters will also be looking to take on Web developers with rare skills – DHTML and Broadvision e-commerce are two in strong demand right now – and cross-train them as editors. "Now is a good time to be learning Java," says Planet Recruit's Chris Ford.

4_MOTION CAPTURE STUDIO

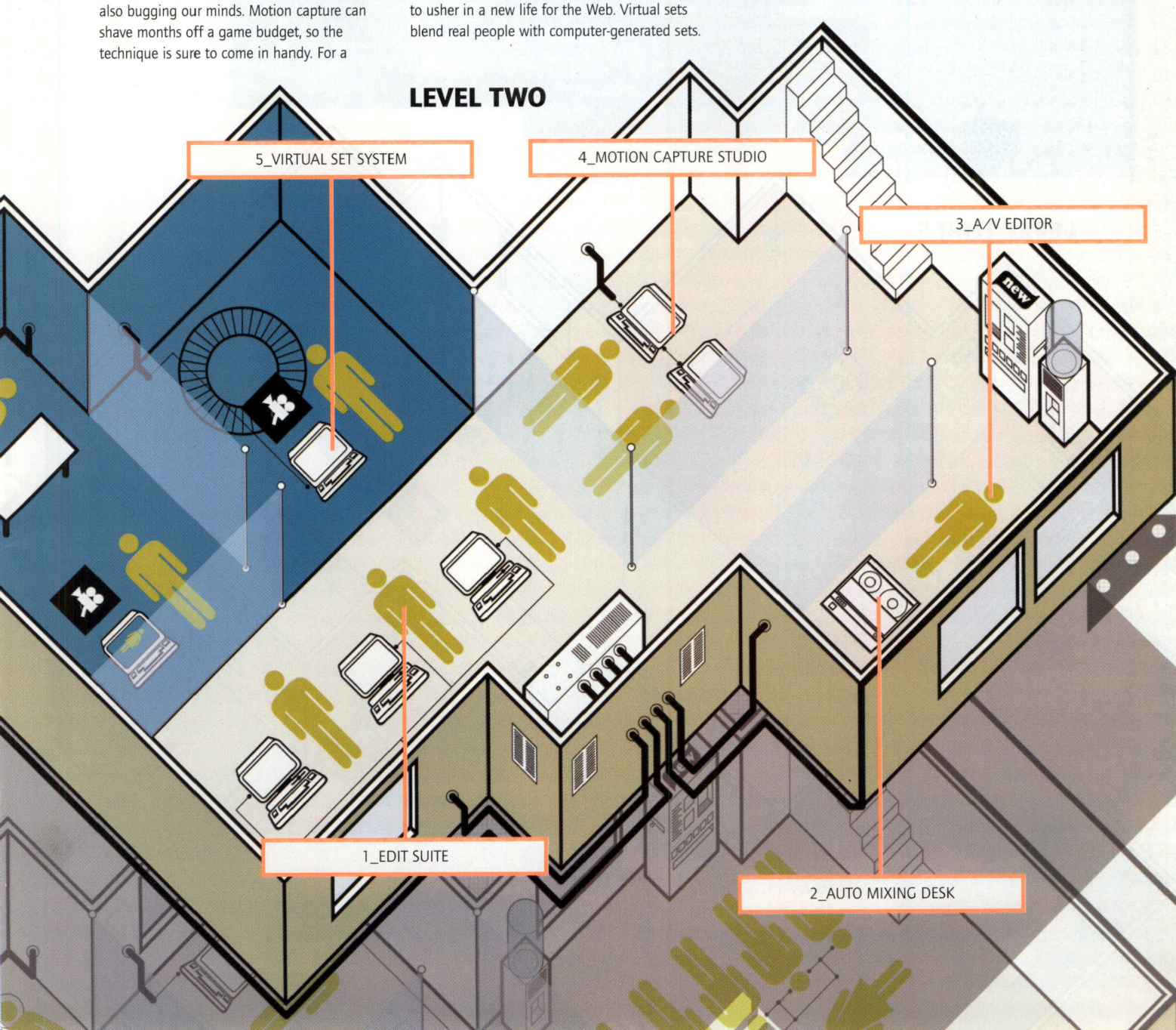
Breathing life into stick figures using the corner pages of schoolbooks may have kept bored pupils awake in class, but nothing short of motion capture will keep an animator in tomorrow's Web studio. Web games are the tip for the future – not only superseding TV, but also bugging our minds. Motion capture can shave months off a game budget, so the technique is sure to come in handy. For a glimpse of the future, take a look at Digital Image's Design Monkey (www.didi.com), a motion capture device that uses a poseable humanoid figure.

Kits cost big money now, but one day they'll be a DV camera and some natty software. Expect one to be slotted into the corner of every Web studio, besides being used to make the odd Disney movie. With enough experience, you might even be able to perfect software that uses remote Webcams to record motion data! Viewers could bop in front of their computers, causing your site's CG characters to follow their moves on-screen. You heard it here first.

5_VIRTUAL SET SYSTEM

When KKYK-TV went online last year with a $750,000 Discreet Logic virtual set, it seemed to usher in a new life for the Web. Virtual sets blend real people with computer-generated sets. As everything else online is 'fake' anyway, why shouldn't Web studios in future years use a virtual set system as the basis for online broadcasts and content creation? Web shops will have access to high-end kit that's currently restricted to the larger broadcasters.

RT-Set has just released its iNCA system, a mobile broadcast system designed specifically for Web studios. This sort of installation will become a necessity, as studios look to provide video-based content for their sites. Whether it's one-to-one interviews, corporate presentations or even populist soap opera, the upcoming price reductions will make virtual set technology a boon for any Web studio worth its salt. Factor in a decent digital video camera, and you'll have a powerful system. ➤



LEVEL THREE

MUSICIANS DO IT. Market researchers do it. Even television producers do it. So why don't Web studios have an area where people can see their products in their natural environment? Answer: they will, and some already do. Making the bean counter comfortable while they see the product of all those late nights will become the dividing line between garage design studios and professional design shops in this client-centric industry.

1_TRADITIONAL TESTING ROOM

Future Web studios will have the obligatory banks of computers on which to test their Websites, running different browsers, different modem connections and different screen sizes. But that's not all.

Take the example of a (nameless) games company that used to sit teenagers at consoles for hours on end, with a plate of chocolate biscuits on one side, cans of coke on the other, and a joystick between the two. Future testing facilities could follow this idea to its *Clockwork Orange*-esque end.

2_TV TESTING ROOM

If you want to know what a Website looks like on an average TV in an average room, how it sounds through cheap speakers, and whether little Johnny on his stool can see it as clearly as grandad on the sofa, then you need a testing facility to mimic the living room environment. A sofa and telly are good starting points. Web-TV designers will need a facility that's as close to reality as possible.

3_CHILLOUT ZONE

The idea that 'the customer (or client) is always right' has been a staple of business for decades now, and there's no way that's going to change in the future. As a Web studio, it's crucial to provide incoming clients with facilities that are as impressive as possible.

Call it mollycoddling if you like, but comfy chairs, plentiful drinks and a sprinkling of hi-tech gadgets to play with will continue to be an important part of every half-decent agency. If your clients start dropping in just to hang out, you know you're doing something right. But remember: anything you can do, your rivals will quickly learn to do better – so you'll need to keep up. ■

TEXT: **MORGAN HOLT** ILLUSTRATIONS: **ORANGECURVE**

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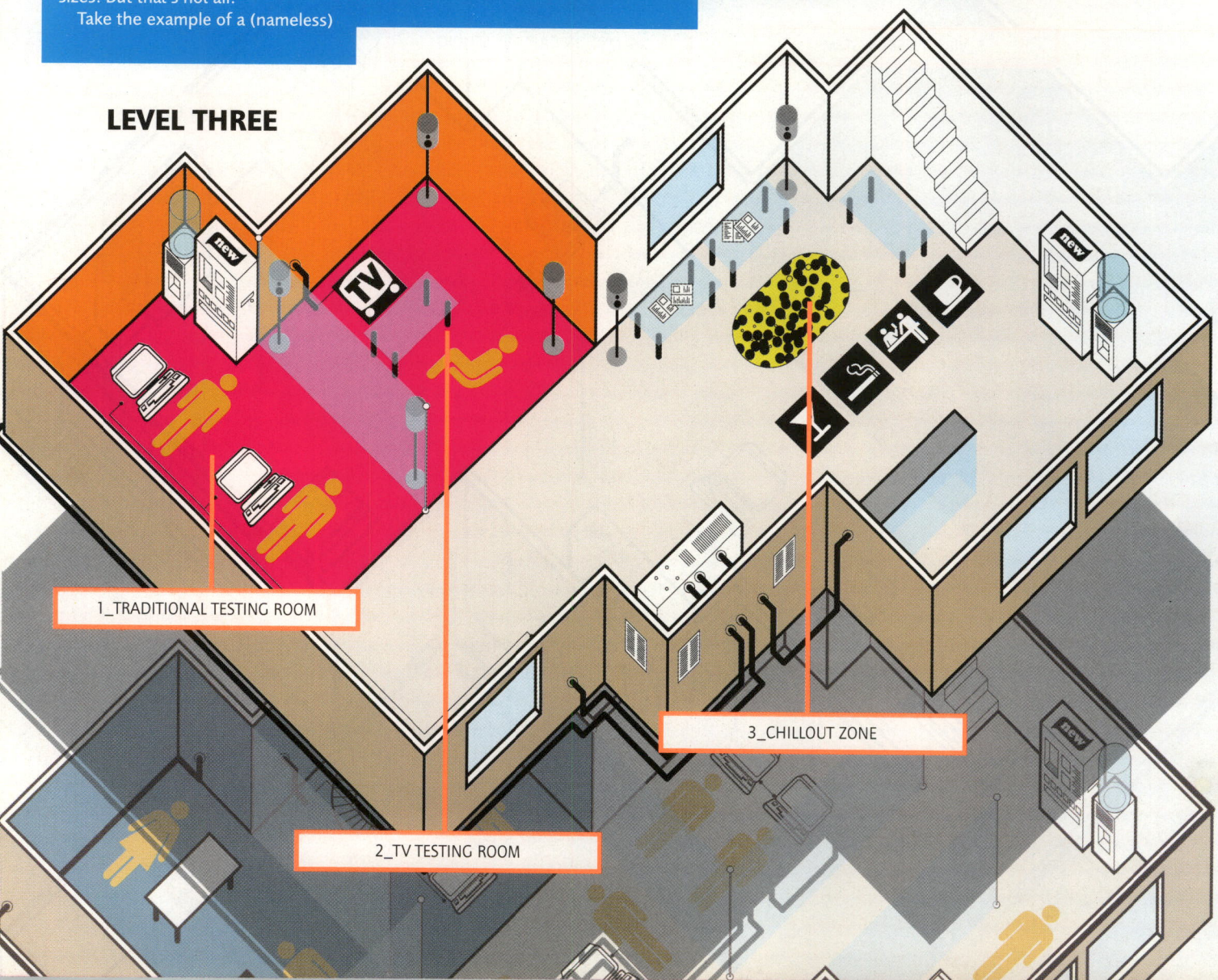
That's our vision; now tell us yours. We want to know what technologies would enhance your professional life – work tools or leisure enhancements? Current fave suggestions in our office is the 'combined pizza-and-espresso-machine-with-retractable-ashtray', suggested by one designer in the research for this feature. We'll feature the best suggestions on our Website. Check out www.createonline.co.uk



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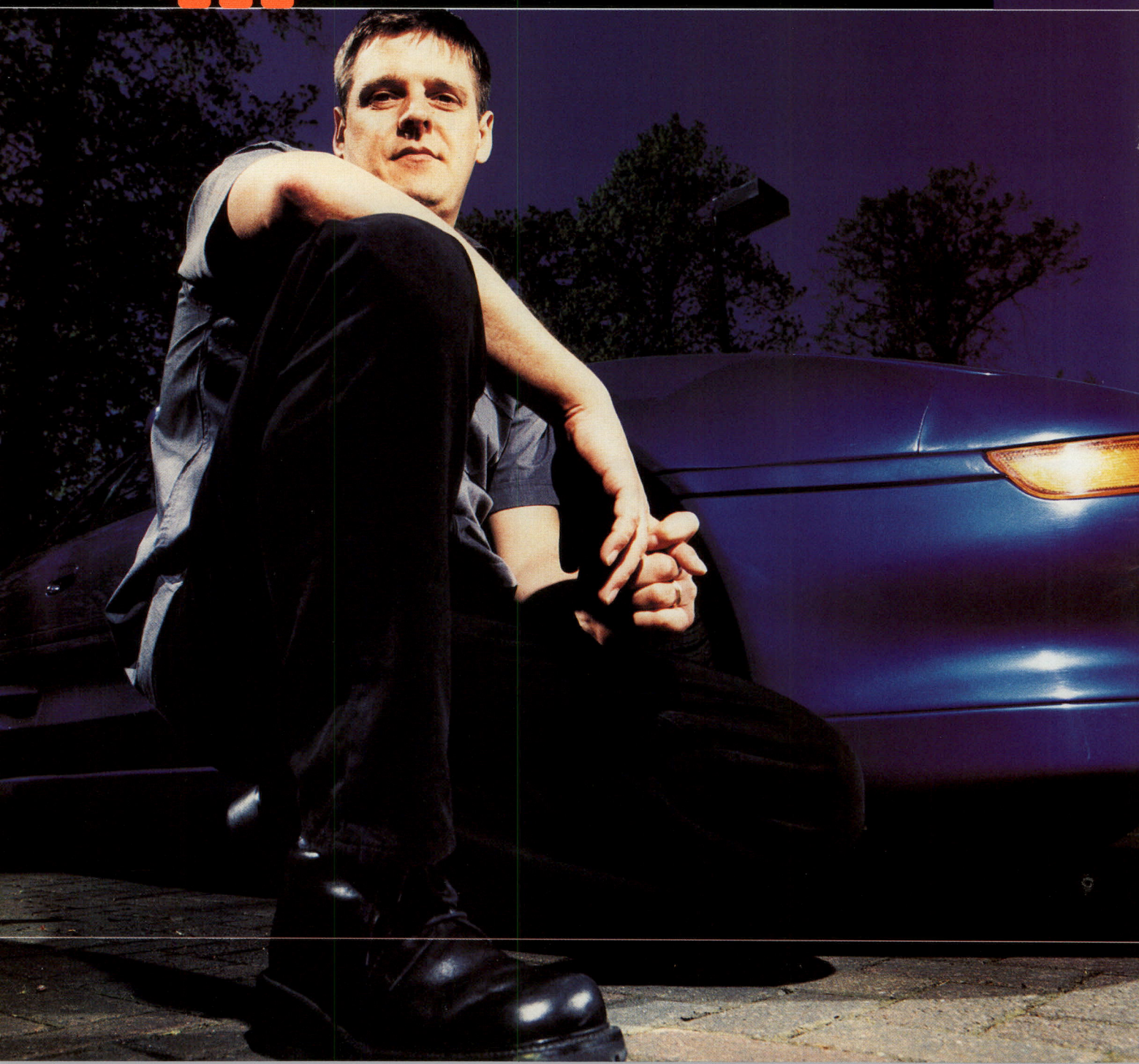
IN FIVE YEARS

people power

DIGITAL ANIMATIONS GROUP, CREATORS OF ANANOVA, IS ALREADY LOOKING AHEAD TO WHAT COMES NEXT – AS DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR LAURIE McCULLOCH REVEALS



Virtual characters have crossed the gaming frontier and are set for a mass invasion across the Web. When wireless technology takes off, they'll even be infiltrating your mobile phone.

With Ananova making a confident bid for the mantle of the Web's first entirely computer-generated superstar, we thought it would be worth hearing what the people responsible for her animation, Scottish firm Digital Animations Group, have to say about the future of Web-based virtual characters.

We didn't bargain, however, for the sheer ambition of development director Laurie McCulloch's future vision. The company may have made its name producing high-quality animation for television and games, but its primary target is to revolutionise the Web – not to mention taking wireless technology to the next level.

The ins and outs of the Ananova project are discussed in *'How they did it'* on p44, but DAG is already looking to the next generation of virtual characters, aided by the imminent flood of new access technologies.

"We've got broadband starting to make an appearance, people are starting to get home ISDN connections, and ADSL and cable modems are now around the corner," says McCulloch. "The density of imagery and what's possible on the Web are just coming up and up, which is going to unlock people's creativity and open up whole new areas."

DAG is looking at two developments to drive the growth of virtual characters in the future. One is the convergence of TV and the Internet (*see feature on p70*), which is going to bring the Web into people's living rooms. The other is wireless. "The technology and size of the market are going to unlock lots of new possibilities," he stresses. "When you start thinking of it in terms of virtual characters, it makes things very interesting for us."

FRIENDLY FACES

But why are virtual characters going to be so important to Web designers in the future? For McCulloch, it's a question of consumer preference. "It's human nature – people relate to other people, so using a character is a very natural way of communicating information."

As far as the topic of news is concerned, virtual characters look set to bring the Web even closer to the news model popularised by television. A talking head automatically adds a degree of authority – something that the major text-based news Websites have so far lacked. It's for this reason that McCulloch sees opportunities opening up for virtual characters.

"It's all down to stereotypes," he says. "If you look on a Website and see a virtual character in the guise of a gentleman with a bowler hat which is giving financial advice, you're more likely to respect that advice than if the character was a seven-year-old kid with a skateboard."

In the not-so-distant future, the Web will be populated by hundreds of virtual characters, all doing their utmost to convince consumers to believe their information or buy their product.

However, DAG is looking beyond virtual characters on the Web. What's really got McCulloch fired up is the vast potential offered by the next generations of wireless technology.

"Once we start linking virtual characters on to mobile devices, you'll be able to create characters that can be with people anywhere in the world at any time of day," he says.

He envisages a future where virtual characters will become 'personal information assistants', which pop up on your mobile and offer to book a table at a restaurant or plane tickets. They might perhaps tell you the important news of the day, or even suggest a good night out, selected to satisfy your personal profile which you will have already inputted into the phone.

"This might sound a bit pompous, but it'll be like having your own guardian angel with you wherever you go," says McCulloch. "It will also save mobile users a lot of time and effort."

FROM GIMMICK TO 3G

Unfortunately, it'll be a long time before the current generation of WAP phones are able to cope with full-on virtual characters, although the Ananova site is looking at providing limited WAP functionality in preparation for more ambitious wireless plans in the future.

"The current generation of WAP phones are a good gimmick, but they're not really that useful," says McCulloch. "The next batch of GPRS phones that will be coming out around ➤

"THE DENSITY OF IMAGERY AND WHAT'S POSSIBLE ON THE WEB ARE JUST COMING UP AND UP, WHICH IS GOING TO UNLOCK PEOPLE'S CREATIVITY AND OPEN UP WHOLE NEW AREAS"

"OUR ULTIMATE AMBITION IS TO CREATE VIRTUAL LIVING, BREATHING ENTITIES THAT CAN EXIST ENTIRELY ON THEIR OWN"

Ananova is only a blueprint for more advanced virtual characters in the future. Her virtual successors will be able to adapt their personality and their appearance to the user's preference. No doubt they'll be very canny sales reps too.

➤ Christmas time are starting to get more interesting, but it's only with the 3G phones that things will really start to go truly crazy. However, they're probably another three or four years away from now."

TOOTH OR DARE

But that's not the end of the line for wireless technology and virtual characters. McCulloch also enthuses about Bluetooth technology, which is set to take virtual characters on to the streets of the UK.

"It's a wireless communication chip which will ultimately be used in all mobile phones. The idea is it'll also be all over the place – in bus shelters, fridges, wherever," he says. "So, if you've got your mobile phone on you and it's got a Bluetooth chip in it, if you walk past a bus shelter that's got one too, there's no reason why the two shouldn't be able to talk to each other."

But what practical purpose would this inter-device communication serve? A very public appearance for your own virtual character, of course.

"Your virtual character could pop up on the bus shelter telling you that you've missed the bus, but another one is due in ten minutes. It's not happening now, but that's the way I see things going."

Moving back to the Web, it's tempting to wonder just how far virtual character technology will progress in the years to come. It won't be so much in terms of visuals, which are already extremely impressive, but in terms of personality, emotion and artificial intelligence. AI is an area that McCulloch believes is about to undergo a revolution.

"What Ananova can do today is just a fraction of what virtual characters will be able to do in the future," he says. "We want to get to a point where we don't stop at just designing the visual representation of her emotions and reactions. We want to make a character who has sufficient understanding of her emotions, her physics and how she works. Our ultimate ambition is to create virtual living, breathing entities that can exist entirely on their own." Now that is the future.

Some of the elements of this future vision are already in place: for example, voice recognition technology, which enables you to talk back to virtual characters. It's not an enormous leap to imagine a future where instead of tapping your requested book into an Amazon input box, you'll instead have a conversation with a virtual librarian, complete with reassuringly dowdy specs, pigtails and cardigan to breed confidence in the consumer. When McCulloch points out that Ananova is just the first step, he's not joking. He's totally serious.

CUSTOM BUILT

This development of AI and reactive technology mirrors the direction in which the games industry is heading – another area DAG is well placed to comment on.

"If you look back to Bullfrog games like *Populous* and *Powermonger*: at the time they were perceived to have great AI, they were ground-breaking. However, most of the time was spent drawing, with only five to ten per cent for the AI," continues McCulloch. "As processing power has come up, you can now do more with the AI, like in the new game *Black & White*, for example . That's how I see virtual characters going in the future too."

McCulloch hopes that virtual characters will follow suit eventually, learning their user's personal preferences and adapting their personalities to suit. It's an idea that's already being explored by sites that look to provide suggestions on the basis of personal buying profiles. Except this is far more complex.

"You'll even be able to have characters that adapt their appearance according to their user's preferences." Remember that idea of your virtual character popping up on a bus shelter as you walk past? Woe betide the secretive business exec who chooses a pneumatic whip-toting dominatrix as his or her virtual character…

McCulloch's ideas for the future may sound extremely ambitious, but he maintains that they're all likely to happen within the next ten years, possibly even five. "You can go to a lot of the cyberpunk or science-fiction books that have appeared in the last ten or twenty years, and see technologies that are going to appear in the next five or ten," he says. "They might look like wild ideas now, but the pieces are already coming together for them to happen. There's definitely some fun stuff ahead." ■

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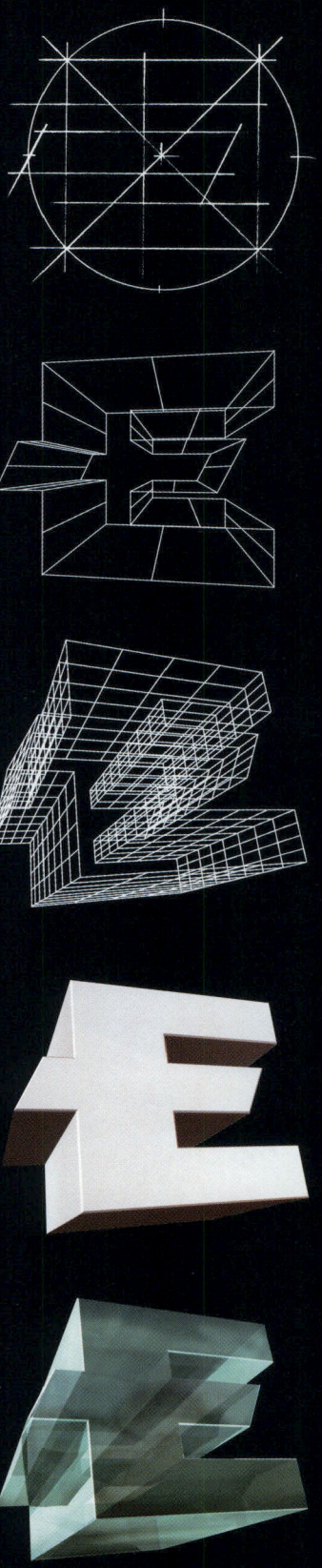

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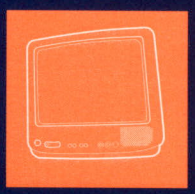
"TO MAKE SITES TRULY EFFECTIVE FOR A TV AUDIENCE, WE'VE GOT TO BE ABLE TO STIR THE EMOTIONS AS WELL AS JUST DO THE JOB TECHNICALLY" **STUART NOLAN, IDTV CONSULTANT**

boxing clever

HOW DOES YOUR WEBSITE LOOK WHEN IT'S VIEWED ON A TV SCREEN? YOU MIGHT NOT THINK IT MATTERS, BUT IT WILL – AND SOONER THAN YOU IMAGINE



What goes around, comes around. For many people, the idea of Web on TV has been dead in the water for the last couple of years, with unsuccessful trials and the failure of various well-publicised attempts to entice television owners to invest in set-top boxes and access the Internet. It simply hasn't happened.

In the UK and in Europe, there's been a rapid emergence of proper interactive TV services that generally offer their own mix of content and services rather than pure Web access. In fact, the walled-garden model that has worked so well for Open doesn't provide access to the Web full stop. This allays parents' fears of Internet content, while also eliminating the problem of how to ensure that sites maintain a high quality look and feel.

It's a big problem, and almost certainly one of the principal reasons for the widely held belief that Web-on-TV will never be a success. However, that's all changing. Although Open may operate a walled garden, some of its cable rivals will provide full access to the full Web.

What's more, there's the new generation of Web-enabled games consoles. Sega's Dreamcast launched last October with full Web access, albeit with a browser that most people would accept needs improvement. Sony's PlayStation 2, which is due out later this year, is also set to provide Web access, but only if you shell out for the modem, which isn't supplied as standard.

Finally, it looks like set-top Web boxes could make a comeback. French firm Netgem has been attracting piles of publicity in recent months. The company teams up with selected partners to offer branded 'Netboxes', giving consumers full access to the Internet through their TVs. A couple of UK launches are planned in the very near future.

QUEUEING UP

The upshot of all this is that millions of consumers will soon be accessing the Web through their televisions as opposed to their computers. A recent report from Forrester Research claims that by 2005, more Europeans will be surfing through their televisions than through computers, with 80 million households alone having access to iDTV services that will enable them to access the Web. Combine this with an IDC report which predicts worldwide Web-enabled games console sales of 25 million in 2003, and you've got quite an audience stacking up.

But if you're a Web designer who wants to make your site accessible to TV browsers, there are certain technical principles that you should be aware of, as well as some social aspects that need to be considered.

NEW RESOLUTIONS

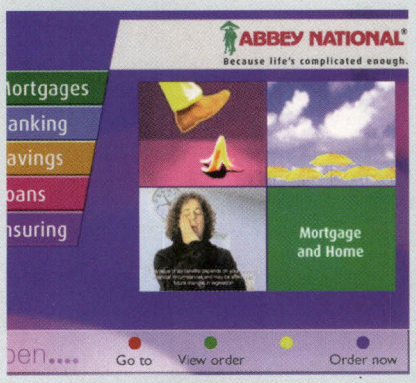
The issues to be aware of when optimising your site for the TV screen can be divided into two camps – the technical and the social. Technical issues relate specifically to how sites look on TV, while social issues are more concerned with the nature of your audience. While it's fairly easy to get a handle on the first set, it's the social considerations that require the biggest attitude shift for designers.

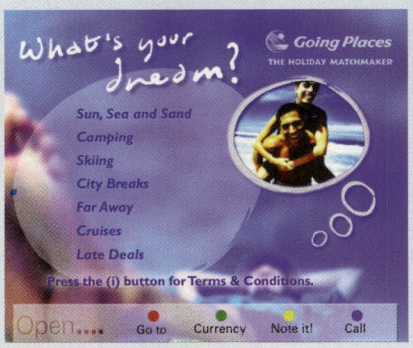
But first, the technical. Often, designers who start work on optimising a site for the TV see the new medium as just one big set of restrictions. "It can be really frustrating at first, especially if you're used to working on complex Websites with *Flash* and so on," says Stuart Nolan, iDTV consultant at Oyster Partners and lecturer on the cultural differences between TVs and PCs. He cites the low resolution of the television screen as one key issue. "The perceived resolution of most TV screens is below 50dpi, and that's something that's not going to change in the near future."

The resolution issue causes Web designers a number of problems, not only the type of graphics and text that can be used, but also the content of the pages. For a start, you should forget any ideas about using intricate details in your site's graphics – they simply won't come through on the TV screen. It may look beautiful on a high-res PC monitor, but to the average TV viewer, if it's there at all, it will just look fiddly and confusing.

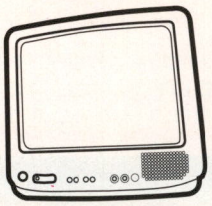
APHELION TELEVISION:- £1895 WWW.PLACESANDSPACES.COM

Coming to a television set near you, Netgem's NetBox offers full access to the Internet via a remote control. The Netgem Website has been designed for optimum clarity and impact when viewed on a TV screen.





Want to know what TV-optimised Websites may look like in the future? Take a look at the iDTV sites of today on platforms like Open. They rely on the same basic principles of TV design that Websites will need in the future.



RGB DOWNLOAD **TV**

Then there's the matter of text. Despite the recent emergence of better animation and video streaming technologies, the Web has traditionally been a text-based medium.

"Essentially, using the Web involves typing in lots of words and being able to get lots of words back in response," says Michael Blakstad, chairman at interactive media company Workhouse, and another interactive TV expert. "The coolest sites at the moment are those that rely on text more than they do on pictures."

However, because of the low resolution of television screens, text has to be blown up in size, which in turn means you can't fit as many words on a page. An unoptimised Web page can often be a visual monstrosity with gigantic text in shocking fonts when viewed on a television set. What's more, because TV screens are interlaced, the use of Serif fonts can lead to painful flickering effects, because small trailing pixels tend to flicker back and forth.

"Everything's slightly blurry anyway," says Stuart. "But if you use Serif fonts, they automatically become flickery too." Traditional print designers are taught that Serif fonts lend authority to the content. Unfortunately, on a TV set, they'll only make your viewers squint.

COLOUR BLIND

There's also a whole range of colour difference issues that will have many a Web designer scratching their head in bafflement. "Colours that look fine on a PC just don't work on a TV," stresses Stuart. "If you use very saturated colours next to one another, you get a blooming effect, and chroma-crawl too." To design good looking pages for the television screen, you need to look at the colour schemes used by broadcasters rather than Web designers. Black text on a white background? Not unless you want to give your users a headache.

"Clients have asked us: 'How can we preserve our corporate colour when on one TV set it looks one colour, and on another it looks completely different'?" says Michael Blakstad. "There's an awful lot of standardisation issues to resolve." The problem here for designers is that a colour that looks great on their computer screen may well look unattractive on a TV.

COUCH POTATO

Then there are the social issues – the considerations that relate to the way in which people interact with their television sets. Once again, the issue of text rears its ugly head. Fill your screen with columns of text, and you'll turn off an audience who just aren't prepared for it.

"You can only have so many words on a page before it starts to look ugly and cluttered," says Michael. Stuart agrees: "With TV, we're used to faces and TV-type images. We're not used to columns and columns of text, especially if you then have to scroll through it."

Designing for the television involves less text and more images. It's a cleaner look, designed to look good for people sitting 12-feet away from the set – known as 'lean back' and 'lean forward'. Whereas computer users sit close to the screen to focus on its content, TV viewers lean back in their armchairs, so everything on screen has to be big and bold.

Another key consideration which is easily overlooked is what TV viewers are using to browse the Internet, as it's unlikely to be a mouse and keyboard. The majority of Dreamcast owners in the UK use their joypads, while other TV browsers are likely to be using their remote controls. Even Open, which has promoted its keyboard peripheral as "the ultimate coffee-table accessory", has yet to win over most of its users.

"If most of your users are using their remote control, you've got to design your site to take that into account," continues Michael. "If you don't, your site will be absolutely tortuous to use." Clear buttons – and as few of them as possible – enable easy browsing.

For the same reasons, complicated search procedures are out. Upmystreet.com is one Website that's currently making the transition to TV – in the form of Open. On the Web, the site

"IN FIVE YEARS TIME, I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT THE MAJORITY OF WEBSITES WILL BE DESIGNED TO LOOK GOOD ON TV"
JOSEPH HADDAD, NETGEM CEO

relies on users entering search terms to find the information they want. "We simply can't do that with people who are using a remote control," says Paola Thomas, head of new media development. "We're having to find some quite imaginative ways around the problem."

NEW BEGINNING

And that's the nub of making your site accessible to television browsers – rather than being a set of new restrictions on your creativity, it's a challenge that you can rise to. "Don't see them as limits," counsels Stuart. "Once you get past the technical requirements, that's where the real design begins. If you like problem-solving, it's great fun."

Most designers have yet to even think about getting to grips with the technical problems. As Web-enabled games consoles take off, and if the likes of Netgem can succeed in positioning its Netboxes on top of TV sets nationwide, designers will be forced to start considering the demands of television as a medium on which people view their Websites. And that's when Web design will rise to the next level.

"The biggest difference between the way people interact with their TVs and their PCs is one of emotion," believes Stuart. "We have a much more emotional relationship with our television sets; they're part of the family. This is where it's going to get really interesting in the future. To make sites truly effective for a TV audience, we've got to be able to stir the emotions as well as just do the job technically."

Stuart sees this as the future direction for Websites and interactive TV services alike: tapping into television culture rather than simply porting across the language and systems of the Web. "It doesn't necessarily involve complicated technology; you don't need full-motion video or audio," he says. "It can be little linguistic keys, like the way something's phrased, or a simple image. It's elements like these that give you personality, and that's what you need if you're trying to appeal to a television audience."

TV STAR

So that's a starter guide to the complexities of optimising your site for the television screen. But what does this mean for the future? Will all sites be split into different versions?

It's not hard to imagine dual sites, with separate front-ends for PCs, TVs, wireless devices and so on. And that's the approach currently being adopted by those developers who've pitched in early to support TV browsers. On first accessing the site, you're invited to select your mode of access, after which you're taken to the relevant front page for your chosen screen.

But interestingly, some people believe that give it five years and all Websites will be designed first and foremost for the TV screen. Why? Well, remember that Forrester report which claims more people will be using their television set to view Websites? That's part of the equation. But then there's also the fact that sites which have been optimised for the TV screen automatically look good on a PC. Designing with the TV screen in mind forces the designer to give more thought to issues such as clarity, navigation and the dreaded usability – all of which are crucial to creating an effective Website.

"In five years' time, I have no doubt that the majority of Websites will be designed to look good on the television," says Netgem CEO Joseph Haddad – but then, you'd expect him to say that. Nevertheless, we think he may well be right – and if he is, articles such as this are only the first step. Designers will need more detailed style guidelines, not to mention experience, which will only be gained as TV browsing takes off.

We'll keep you posted. ■

TEXT: **STUART DREDGE**

CONSOLE YOURSELF

When it launched in October last year, Sega's Dreamcast was the first ever games console to offer access to email and the Internet, as well as the usual gaming action. The console shipped complete with its own browser, *DreamKey*, and limited availability of a keyboard peripheral to aid emailing and Web surfing.

Besides the limitations of displaying sites on the TV screen discussed in the main body of this feature, *DreamKey* also has problems viewing *Flash* or *Shockwave* content, not to mention various audio formats. The end result is that if sites work at all, they tend to look somewhat, well, displeasing to the eye.

Naturally, games-focused Websites have been quick to respond to the existence of a whole new audience of Web users. As expected, the sites devoted to Dreamcast magazines are designed with TV viewers in mind, as are Sega's own Websites. Sega is hoping that when it releases its improved second version of *DreamKey*, more support will follow.

Nevertheless, with the release of Sony's PlayStation 2 console later this year, thousands more gamers will have access to the Internet once they've bought the extra modem. And in the future, the number of console Internet users is set to mushroom. It seems likely that in years to come, Web agencies will need more guidance from companies like Sega and Sony if they want to create sites that are compatible with this new generation of browsers.

CHECK OUT
Check out Sega's official developers' guide to producing Dreamcast-friendly Websites on this month's cover CD.

IN FIVE YEARS

traditional values

MOVING WITH THE TIMES IS EASIER SAID THAN DONE, BUT MORE AND MORE PRINT DESIGNERS ARE NOW TAKING UP THE WEB'S CHALLENGE. MAGAZINE DESIGNER AND WEB DESIGN TRAINING CONSULTANT BRIAN COOKMAN ANTICIPATES AN INTERESTING TIME OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS FOR OTHERS MAKING THE SWITCH

"WRITING WILL CHANGE TO A MORE CHATTY APPROACH – IT HAS TO. THE WEB IS STANDING UP, MEETING SOMEBODY IN THE STREET. IT'S NOT SITTING DOWN ROUND THE TABLE HAVING A LITTLE CHAT"

In the next five years the influx of traditional print designers into the Web will undoubtedly alter the way in which Websites are designed. As old integrates with new, concepts will evolve and change, with both sides learning from each other. In the view of Brian Cookman, navigation and editorial will undergo the biggest changes of all.

Cookman is well placed to comment. A magazine and newspaper designer for 30 years, he could be forgiven for ever thinking he would be a one-medium man until the day he hung up his slide rule. In 1993, however, he suddenly realised 'just what the Web was doing'. Seven years on and he is passing on his Web design knowledge to potential protégés at the PMA Training centre in Clerkenwell, London.

"Most of the time I've been working on consultancy, so it's been more cerebral than physical," he reflects. "I've had to learn HTML and so forth in the process, but my work's been more about how a site's constructed, what things are going to change, what things are going to happen."

DEEP IMPACT

Cookman's theorising for companies such as EMAP has led him to believe that print designers can make a significant impact on the Web. Despite the obvious differences between print and new media, the PMA trainer is certain there's enough of a crossover between the two for traditional designers to cope. "The principals of design remain the same," he says. "Everything in design is simplicity and consistency, and this applies to the Web as much as it does to print."

Cookman sees traditional designers building on this common denominator and gradually instilling their own values on to the Web. "Print designers will calm things down," he says. "I think you'll get much more of a publishing look and feel about the Web. Things that are being kicked into touch at the moment, like navigation and legibility, are going to come back."

Ease of navigation is key to Cookman's view of the next few years. "Our job is to get information over," he explains. "Far too many colours are being used at the moment, which isn't helping. The Web is the same as a magazine. If you put graduated tints on every page, people will go barmy by the end of the day. It's like reading *Raygun* – great fun but totally ineligible.

"Too many designers are into making spectacular Websites that simply don't work. It looks fantastic, but you don't know where to go. I think this will change as more traditional designers move across."

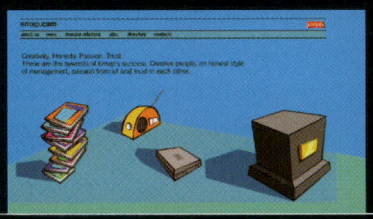
He admits, though, that writing for the Web differs greatly from editorial on the printed page. "A magazine page is all about words," he says. "The whole point of design in the publishing world is to make the written word read, but the same isn't true of Net publishing, and the majority of editorial on the Web has yet to realise this."

Cookman believes the traditional design constraints that print designers will bring to the Web will alter the way text is produced on the Internet. "Text will have to be broken down into smaller sections," he says. "It will make editors realise that they can't write *War and Peace*. Writing will change to a more chatty approach – it has to. The Web is standing up, meeting somebody in the street. It's not sitting down round the table having a little chat."

As Website production develops, this typographical background will prove even more beneficial. "At the moment, a lot of Web designers make everything too small because they reckon their audience will always be two feet away," Cookman adds. "What never occurs to anybody, as far as I can make out, is that we're all going to be working on TV in about two years' time. TVs are ten feet away, so type's going to be huge – 30 or 40-point."

TEAM TACTICS

Prophesising about the Web's future, Cookman believes we can learn a great deal from the past. "What's happening now with the Web happened in 1985 with desktop publishing," he says. "When we went into DTP, we suddenly realised we were going to have to be typographers, illustrators, layout artists, repro technicians and so on. A lot of us went mad and learned everything. It's the same with ➤



Print designers can bring a lot to the Web as a lot of the same criteria applies, be it typographical or concerning the use of colour. At the same time though, the Web is an entirely different medium, so the transition won't be instant.

designing on the Web now: I think people are in danger of multi-skilling themselves to death."

A quick glimpse at any Web recruitment section and you can understand his fears. Agencies are asking more and more from their employees. It seems you need to have a thorough knowledge of HTML, Java, JavaScript and *Flash* just for your application form to be given a second glance. Companies risk alienating true design specialists with this approach, and they could end up employing people who know a bit about everything but have no in-depth understanding of one specific aspect.

JACK OF ONE TRADE

To avoid overloading designers with numerous skillsets, Cookman sees Websites being developed by a small team of people, each with their own particular area of expertise.

"All you'll need is an editor for the words, a designer to make it look good and then a programmer to make it work smoothly," he says. Any animation or work requiring additional skills would be freelanced to specialists. Such an allocation of roles would ultimately ease the transfer of print designers to the Web. With less peripheral skills to learn, they can focus on designing for a new medium.

Cookman believes that the similarity in software will also help traditional designers settle into their new field. Designers who are used to working with toolboxes and windows in print applications will soon become familiar with starter packages like *PageMill*, *GoLive* and *Cyberstudio*. Higher-end applications, however, may prove more difficult. Despite *Quark's* movements in Web design, he stresses that traditional designers will need to work with Web tools rather than magazine design products.

"I think *Quark's* ideas are great," he says. "This concept of content coming into a central team of designers who process it for the Web, print, WAP and Interactive TV could be terrific, but at the moment I don't think you should work from *Quark*. It's a different attitude and a different mindset."

But even if *Quark* does develop a Web design package, Cookman admits that print designers will have to accept that Web design is a new format.

"They should really start with a blank piece of paper and no preconceptions," he says. "Where techies were always making mistakes by having too much grey background or by having too much going on simply because they could, traditional designers are going to come in thinking they can carry on in the Web from where they left off in magazines. They will have their old skills and these will still be used, but it will take them a while to realise that it isn't the same medium.

"For instance, you're not navigating in the way you used to. You used to start at the cover and work your way through contents, news and so on. You went from A to B in a logical step, but that no longer works. Now you could go A to Z to M and so on, and that's totally radical to design. I think designers will be much more at home in two years' time when they start to realise what does and doesn't work."

In such a rapidly changing industry, two years may sound like a long time, but Cookman thinks the wait will be justified. If print designers change the Web by just a fraction of what he predicts, then the next few years should certainly prove interesting.

GET THE SKILLS

Good training is essential for any industry to develop and improve, and Cookman feels that Web design courses will get bigger and better.

"At the moment there's very few good courses and people are having to learn on the job," he says. "But in five years' time, you're going to get real high-quality training in Web design. We're already getting a load of work at PMA. We've put another four Web-related courses on and it's just going to go up and up." ■

TEXT: KEITH DREW / PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMIE BEEDEN

• TO FIND OUT WHAT QUARK, MACROMEDIA AND ADOBE HAVE IN STORE, TURN TO PAGE 12. YOU CAN CONTACT PMA TRAINING ON T: 01480 300 653.

"FAR TOO MANY COLOURS ARE BEING USED AT THE MOMENT. THE WEB IS THE SAME AS A MAGAZINE. IF YOU PUT GRADUATED TINTS ON EVERY PAGE, PEOPLE WILL GO BARMY"

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FUTURE • SHOCK

the big issue

Name: **Steve Vranakis** Age: **28**
Role: **New media creative manager**
Company: **WCRS ad agency (www.wcrs.co.uk)**
Background: **Steve has been creative director at Modem Media Poppe Tyson, and associate creative director in the digital arm of PJ DDB Needham in his native Vancouver.**

Name: **Jon Bains** Age: **28**
Role: **Chairman**
Company: **Lateral (www.lateral.net)**
Background: **Before starting up Lateral, Jon founded Obsolete. Prior to his digital endeavours, he was a music journalist and DJ.**

Name: **Gary Lockton** Age: **30**
Role: **Chief executive**
Company: **Deepgroup (www.deepgroup.com)**
Background: **Best known for the digital agency Deep End in the UK. ("I didn't do fuck all before that – I left college and started the company a week later.")**

WHILE WE'VE COVERED FUTURE CREATIVE POSSIBILITIES FOR ONLINE DESIGN IN THIS ISSUE, WHAT WILL SUCH DEVELOPMENTS MEAN FOR WEB DESIGN AGENCIES? TO FIND OUT, WE GATHERED A SELECT BUNCH OF INDUSTRY PUNDITS AND GRILLED THEM TIL THEY WERE NICELY BROWN

Name: **Mark Higham** Age: **32**
Role: **Editor in chief, create**
Company: **Future Publishing (www.futurenet.co.uk)**
Background: **Mark has 12 years of experience in publishing. He was launch editor on *Computer Arts* and *Escape*, and spent a year in San Francisco with Imagine publishing.**

Name: **Alex Barnett** Age: **29**
Role: **Sales & marketing director**
Company: **Bluewave (www.bluewave.com)**
Background: **Alex has been at Bluewave for four years, looking after the account management business development team. Before that, he produced sites from home.**

Name: **Hugo Manassei** Age: **30**
Role: **Creative director**
Company: **Oyster (www.oyster.co.uk)**
Background: **Before co-founding Oyster in 1996, Hugo co-founded the Myriad Agency (now Method 5), an Internet design agency in New York.**

Name: **Mark Smith** Age: **28**
Role: **Art director**
Company: **Pres.co (www.pres.co.uk)**
Background: **Mark has worked at Pres.co for seven years. Before that, he worked at a print design company he started with his mates from college, creating brochures and magazines.**

QUESTION TIME

With the imminent arrival of broadband, creative possibilities such as extensive use of *Flash* and effective streaming video are being opened up. What do existing agencies need to do to expand and adapt to meet the demands of this rapidly evolving technology?

GARY: With broadband, it depends if you've worked in TV before. Some agencies (like ours to a certain extent) have TV production capability already. It gives you a bit of a head start, but it's not rocket science. Also, with many forms of broadband, it's not all about TV: broadband wireless is very exciting. But certainly having a TV background helps – either from working at an ad agency or having worked in TV production (broadcast graphics for example).

ALEX: Yeah, it's got to be people who understand traditional TV format production so they can throw that into the mix. It's been like that for the last five years – the Web design industry has always attracted people from different industries who come in and bring their own things.

MARK: We're employing people from broadcast and TV – we understand that a mix of skills is required. Web agencies need video conceptual/storyboarding skills plus sound engineering and production. They also need some areas of broadcast design, notably structuring information round full moving video (how to structure and tell a story in rich interactive media á la Sky Digital football, for example); live event installation design; touch screen kiosks and so on.

BT claims that broadband technology is going to open up new opportunities for online advertising. Will Web agencies have to operate more like ad agencies?

HUGO: Creatively, the problems are and will become more complex. That's what the technology will bring – creative problems as in the creative strategy behind things. For example, we're working for Orange and we're defining every single digital experience that users will have with Orange now and in the future. New technology means that the whole nature of what a digital Orange experience is will be completely broadened – it has far more possibilities. My point is that the role of a creative strategist is becoming far more complex and far more in demand.

STEVE: The planning and thinking that goes on in ad agencies is very difficult to replicate and that's why there are ad agencies. It's very easy to take legacy-creative and put it online. A lot of new media agencies claim to do that and haven't been able to do it. You need a brand to begin with – but how many agencies can claim that it's built brands online? Even Amazon wasn't built entirely online.

ALEX: I agree. It's a question of figuring out what kind of company you are – are you a Web design production company or are you a creative strategist company? If you're going to be a creative strategist, you have to have an understanding down to the specialisation level of every single kind of digital medium there is and will be for the next two years. From our point of view at Bluewave, that's not our job and we've said no. What we want is for you, the client, to be able to define exactly what the brand is. So what you're asking from Bluewave is for an interpretation and application of that brand in the medium that is, for example, the Web. That's our specialisation. We win loads of pitches because competitors claim to be one-stop shops and clients don't believe them. They've been bullshitted to before and they're getting smarter. The ad agencies are the specialists in this area of creative strategy.

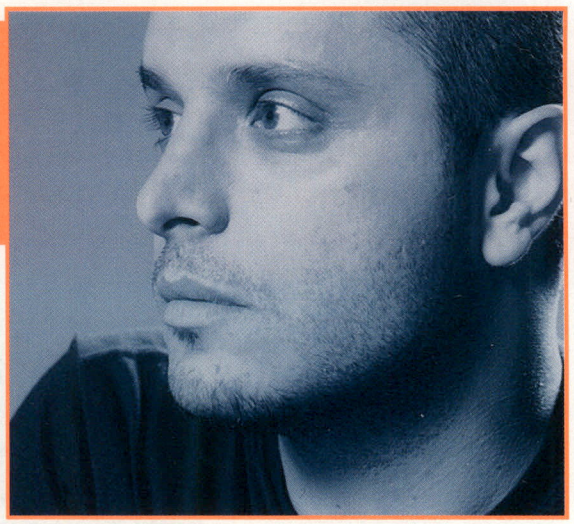
As ad agencies and Web agencies naturally come closer together over the next five years, is there a threat that ad agencies will simply set up their own in-house Web design agencies and muscle you out?

MARK: I think there was a threat but it's already gone.

ALEX: We're in the fourth cycle at the moment. About five years back, ad agencies didn't give a shit about the Web. It was like: "Oh, technology. Whatever…" Then they said they could do it and started fucking their productions up – they started losing massive media accounts on the back of a poor Web job they couldn't do. Then these agencies started farming them out and we've started seeing the acquisitions in the last two years. It will be interesting to see when the next cycle occurs. My company believes that it will be a level of specialisation where you're working with companies not trying to do the whole lot – because it's not realistic to do so.

JON: There has always been a supposed threat from the ad agencies. Us independents were all going to get shut out, but it's never happened. One thing that will get more complex will be the relationships between the

"FLASH-TURBATION IS RIFE ON THE WEB. FLASH IS GOOD, BUT YOU STILL NEED TO PLAN THINGS. NOT ENOUGH PEOPLE DO THAT" – STEVE



Gary (left) sees lastminute.coms as the new goldrush: "We're not speculating – we are there making things that we know are and will be necessary in the future." Mark agrees with him: "This is just the beginning," he confirms.

Alex (right) on ad agencies trying to provide catch-all services: "They lost big media accounts because they did bad Web jobs. I believe there has to be a level of specialisation because it's not realistic for one company to provide the lot."

"THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SUPPOSED THREAT FROM AD AGENCIES. INDEPENDENTS WERE GOING TO GET SHUT DOWN, BUT IT NEVER HAPPENED" – JON

client, the agencies and the media partners – especially the media partners. The issue of broadband is more likely to squeeze people out. It's easier, for example, for a film company to get Virgin to build its site for free because Virgin wants content on its site. So why go through a new media agency which would have normally done the film company's site?

STEVE: When I look at something like Gary's group, I see a lot of people from traditional skillsets there – so why doesn't he acquire an ad agency? I'm playing devil's advocate here, but it really does come down to the people, doesn't it? There are new media agencies that are doing IPOs which are worth more than your traditional agencies which have been around for 50 years!

GARY: I think we'll end up becoming an ad agency group – we already have most of the main components in place. We have a strategy as separate companies, design and PR. We also have brand strategists internally within the design elements and the strategy elements; we have online advertising and so on. All those bits together make an ad agency. The only difference is that we work in digital only – apart from film.

ALEX: From our point of view, we think that's great – the more our competitors diversify, the more a specialised company stands out.

GARY: I think the problem at the moment is that there's so much work around, it doesn't matter. If this is the gold rush, we're all making the jeans and we're in the low risk/low return of the whole deal. Levi's Strauss was built on the back of the gold rush and the gold rush now is the Lastminute.coms. Let them go out and speculate. We're not speculating – we're making things that we know are and will be necessary.

MARK: This is just the beginning.

What weaknesses do Web agencies suffer from at the moment?

GARY: Can you name a Web-based experience that has had the impact of, let's say, the original Audi TV ad? You know, the one with the city wanker. Or the latest Lynx ad with the women talking to camera? 'Do you mind if my best friend joins us?' They're fantastic bits of observation and production, and you don't get stuff like that on the Web.

Why do you think we're not there yet?

STEVE: It's down to technology driving a lot of what you can do. I do think that a lot of new media agencies hide behind technology – everybody's guilty of it.

JON: I disagree. I don't think it's to do with the technology or the creativity – it's about understanding the people you're really talking to.

STEVE: But most of what you see online is very gratuitous. '*Flash*-turbation' – 20-minute *Flash* intros that sit there. *Flash* is great at doing certain things.

JON: But it's not the be all and end all.

STEVE: Yeah, you still need to sit down and plan – you know, draw your little stick men that say: 'He walks there and does this. Then says this and does that.' I don't know if enough people do that.

Do you think Web design companies can produce well observed ideas of the calibre put out by ad agencies?

GARY: Yes, but we've got a lot to learn.

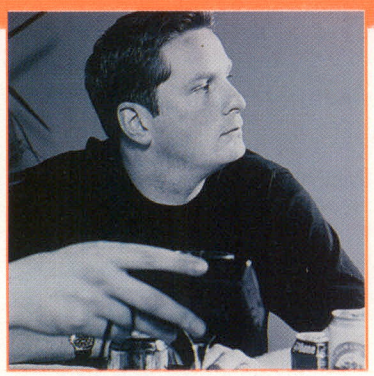
STEVE: You're exploring, though – as ad agencies are becoming communications agencies, so are new media agencies. You do have people from both sides. I think both will become one kind of company: you'll get advertising agencies that redefine and reposition themselves, as you will with new media agencies. A lot of the creative stuff you see online is coming out of new media agencies and is strong enough to drive an offline campaign easily. Some of the stuff is shit hot. Why shouldn't that be incorporated into the aboveline strategy? Purely because right now new media agencies are still seen as the poor cousin of the brand. It's changing, though.

How do you see your own companies developing in the future?

JON: While it's important for us to keep building stuff, once you've built the prototype and specced out a system, it's kind of irrelevant who does the bricks and mortar stuff at the back. We've built our entire careers by building sites and we don't want to do the drone work anymore. That's where we start elevating ourselves to agency status. Once you know how to build a site and get past the fun bit – working out what you're going to do and building the first generation – the rest of it is monkey work.

GARY: We recognise this as well. We're in the process of launching a company called Poolside, and that's specifically a digital production company. What we'd like to do is sell that opportunity to other agencies here or elsewhere. For instance, there's no point in Lateral doing HTML production with 100 people because it doesn't want to spend the time doing so. We have a good line in finding good graduates and so on, so we're going to set up a company which specialises in Web production – as you have in DTP. ➤

"WEB DESIGN HAS MATURED A LOT. THERE ARE HOT PEOPLE OUT THERE DOING GREAT STUFF" – HUGO



Mark (above): "Our industry is immature; the focus has to be on brand/ID, then developing functions of ad agencies in different forms."

We believe that could be really big.
STEVE: That's what agencies do well – they out-source certain types of work to the most appropriate company. That's why they're always hiring the best underground director for the beer ads and the like. If that service of yours was available, it's the kind of service we'd use.

So, Steve, where do you think new media agencies will end up in the future?
STEVE: Well, one of the most influential guys in advertising from one of the best creative shops in the UK recently left to join a new media ad agency because he sees it as a company that understands interactivity and how to use technology. He, on the other hand, understands how to communicate a message and come up with a core proposition – that's what he does well. They have complementary skillsets and that's what you're going to see happening elsewhere.
JON: Lateral has always seen itself as being collaborative – working with the best people. In the future, more and more agencies will be like that.
STEVE: The collaborative process has to happen more. As an advertiser, I want to be able to sit in a room with the best back-end production company, the best online advertising company, a great online buying agency, a great ad agency and so on. That's where we should be.
JON: At the moment, people will come up with a TV/print campaign which will have the core brand name – and then you have to retrofit the digital strategy into it. That's why we can end up supporting, extending or enhancing a bloody TV campaign. It has to change at some point.

So is the Web design business still a cottage industry or have we moved on?
HUGO: We've moved on – it's matured an enormous amount. I think certain companies have done a huge amount for the industry and for smaller agencies in forcing very large organisations to take this industry very seriously on a fundamental level – I'm very grateful to companies like that. Yeah, there are definitely niche opportunities in the future and there are 'grown-ups' out there. There are also hot people out there who're developing inside a culture which is beyond the dotcom. Some small agencies are doing some great stuff.

Finally, what are your hopes for and fears about the future?
GARY: I fear losing new media culture.
JON: It's one of our mission statements – never ever forget why we individually got into this in the first place. It's about the Internet and all its manifestations. It's the coolest, most open communications medium in the world and it's not just about brands.
STEVE: It's so important for an agency to be able to keep people and keep them happy. That's what's really interesting about new media – you walk into most of these shops and there are scooters in the lounge and videogames here and there. That's so important because a lot of these people can go off and easily get hired by somebody else. You even hear about new media agencies resigning multinational brands because it just wasn't fun to work on anymore. You'd never see that happening before.
ALEX: Web design culture will continue as long as it allows people to live a lifestyle they enjoy. This means working in a creative environment where they can be productive; getting paid very well for doing it; plus having an environment where they can globetrot and just knock about great ideas. I think we all hope we've still got that in five years time and are still enjoying the work.
STEVE: The agency of the future is the agency that understands how to communicate messages which are relevant to the consumer – irrespective of the platform or the technology. They'll know how to communicate a message to someone that means something to them. Whatever that agency is, it will probably have a couple of you guys in it. ■

TEXT: **ADAM PHILLIPS** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **JAMIE BEEDEN**

THE SWOT FILES

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE CURRENT WEB DESIGN/NEW MEDIA AGENCY SCENE? READ ON

STRENGTHS

- **A second-to-none understanding of Web culture and technology compared to other media industries.**
- **Agencies also now have genuine respect from other industries – they're no longer seen as upstarts who should leave creative and branding work solely to the big boys of the advertising world.**
- **People from other media are flooding into the new media sector as if there's a goldrush...**

WEAKNESSES

- **Some would argue that Web agency/new media brand ideas aren't yet of a similar calibre to those generated by ad agencies.**
- **There's also a problem with identity: Web design agencies need to decide what they want to be – a new media company, a communications agency, an ad/new media/creative strategy agency or what?**

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Muscling into the ad agency and TV production arenas. Not so long ago, pundits were predicting it would be the other way round.**
- **Moving to the top of the media pile with their multi-disciplined approach and deep pockets.**

THREATS

- **Focusing too much on technology, and not on creativity.**
- **All media agencies need to pull together and work together – if they don't, it'll create friction and hamper creativity and ideas.**
- **There's also a risk of expanding too quickly, diluting their focus and, at worst, going bust – or at best, becoming a Jack-of-all-trades.**

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GALLERY HALL, BUSINESS DESIGN CENTRE. LONDON / 12TH-14TH SEPTEMBER

FEATURES (01 - 05 INCLUSIVE)

TUTORIAL SESSIONS IN WEB DESIGN, IMAGE-EDITING, 3D EFFECTS, DIGITAL VIDEO, ILLUSTRATION AND VIDEOGAMES ARTWORK
SOFTWARE AND HARDWARE TRY-OUTS, COMPETITIONS AND MONEY-SAVING OFFERS
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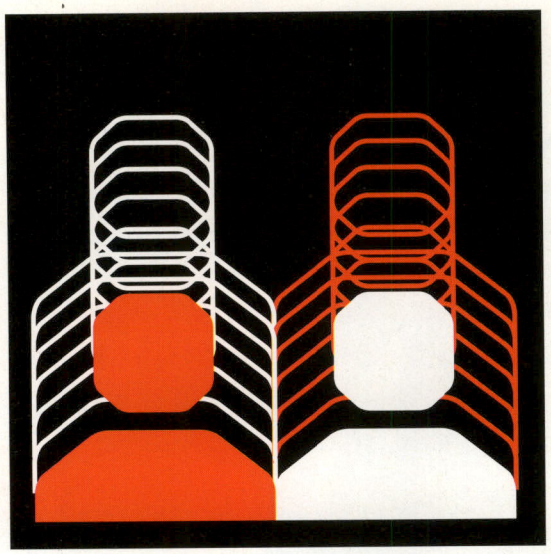

REVIEWS

It's the people who are making it happen. Over the next 15 pages, we talk to the professionals to find out what sites are catching their eye at the moment. Plus, we also listen to what they'd do to kickstart a few older or weaker ideas.

- **RICHARD CARTER,** BINARY VISION, P98
- **ADRIAN DAY,** FREELANCE DESIGNER, P92
- **MARTIN GITTINS,** INTERFACE, P90
- **ALEX GRIFFIN,** DEEPEND, P96
- **MICHAEL ROSE,** SAS DESIGN, P86
- **JUDE SAMUEL,** ACCENT INTERACTIVE, P94
- **RUPERT SILWA,** CLOCKWORK WEB, P86
- **PAUL SONLEY,** RAZORFISH, P99
- **JONATHAN VAUGHAN,** AXCESS, P98

But first, it's over to Joe and Josephine Public to hear their views on WAP...

on the streets

MENTION WAP PHONES TO THE AVERAGE PUNTER ON THE STREET AND THEY'RE MORE LIKELY TO THINK YOU'RE AN EXTRA FROM A 1960s CARTOON THAN SOMEONE WHO SURFS THE INTERNET WHILE ON THE MOVE. TO TEST THIS THEORY, WE WENT TO CAMDEN TO FIND OUT WHAT LONDONERS THINK OF THE FUTURE FOR THE NEW BATPHONES

_1 **SHERILYN MACKENZIE**
Student
"I can't afford a mobile, so I guess I'm waiting for them to be cheaper and probably faster."

_2 **TOM MARRIAGE**
Student
"WAP phones would be good for emailing friends you were trying to meet up with. If there was a map facility you could find them easily too."

_3 **KATIE ASHERTON**
Publishing assistant
"I think the main point of a WAP phone is that you could be walking down a rainy road and booking a holiday in the Bahamas at the same time."

_4 **JESSICA BARLOW**
Office administrator
"Being able to shop on the Web wherever you are would be the big bonus, but the displays will have to be better than they are now."

_5 **JAKE WALKER**
Student
"Sending photos to other people would be a good idea. It would be helpful if you were meeting up with someone and you didn't know what they look like, rather than having to describe yourself."

_6 **ROLAND LOCKE**
Student
"It would be games and email for me, then I wouldn't have to use my computer all the time."

_7 **KEITH ALBION**
Graphic designer
"Email and GPS tracking. I'd never get lost again, and I'd always be able to find my way home when I'm drunk."

_8 **NATASHA WERGEN**
Student and jeweller
"I'd like to be able to check my mail without having to be at college. I could access it from anywhere in the world."

_9 **KATIA BERLOW**
Traveller
"I only use the Internet for email, so having it on a phone would be easier than using a café, as long as it was quite fast."

_10 **JAMES GREENWOOD**
Student
"It needs to be a lot cheaper and easier to use. Also, the reception isn't that good in some places, which is bad news when you're paying a lot for a sophisticated phone and it doesn't work."

_11 **JILLY SANDFORD**
Stall owner
"It needs to be cheaper. Definitely cheaper. It's just a toy rather than a service at the moment."

_12 **ASHLEY WILSON**
Catering assistant
"It'd be a lot of fun to have some online games, for example, a smaller version of *Doom* you could play against lots of other people."

_13 **ROB TURNER**
Student
"I'd use it for email so you could mail people at college without anyone noticing. Nobody will be passing notes any more."

_14 **GURU AUGENES**
Student
"It will be useful for catching up with email without having to sit in front of a computer."

_15 **ABEL FRANCH**
Traveller
"I'd only have it for mail and maybe some kind of locater system for when you get lost. It would be good though if I could upload stuff on to my Website as I went round the world as then everyone could see what I was doing."

_16 **CELIA AIMES**
Legal secretary
"If you have a mobile and the Internet at work or at home, I don't think you really need it. It'll have to offer something totally different before everyone uses it."

_17 **SERENA TATE**
Hairdresser
"I could surf the Net on the way to and from work. You could also download books to read, rather than having to buy them and carry them around."

_18 **ANNA SUTTON**
Student
"If you could use it all round the world you'd always be able to mail people. But you can't even do that with normal mobiles, so that won't happen for a bit."

_19 **STEVE CATES**
Student
"Playing games online would be pretty cool. Everyone would get out of the house more. Maybe."

_20 **LAUREN DENT**
Student
"It's still expensive to surf on the Internet, so on a mobile it would be even worse. I'll wait until it's free."

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY: **KATHERINE DOGGRELL**

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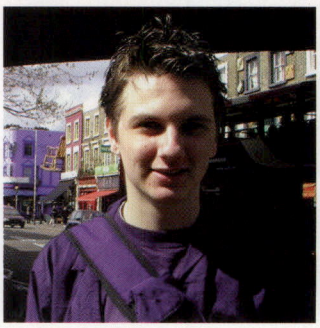
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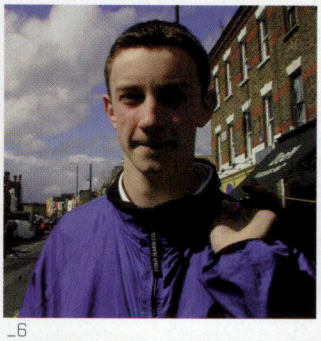
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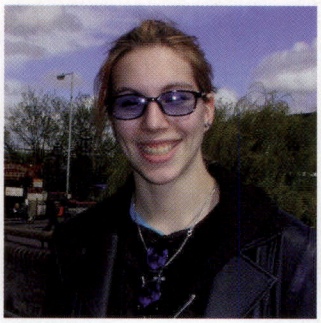
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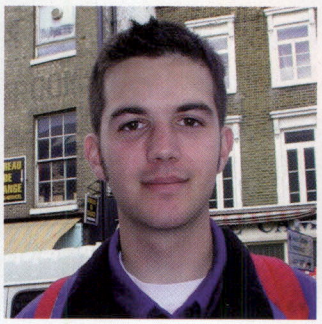
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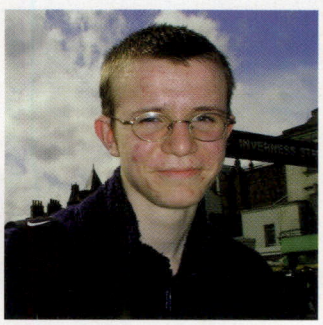
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pistols at dawn

EVERY MONTH create LOOKS AT THE DESIGN OF AN ESTABLISHED WEBSITE AND ASKS IF IT HAS BECOME A CLASSIC TO RIVAL THE LONDON UNDERGROUND OR WHETHER IT'S GONE THE WAY OF THE C5.

FIRST IN THE RING: **AMAZON**

THE TYPICAL USER
Name: Tom Walker (24)
Occupation: Helpdesk manager
Favourite sites:
www.dogpile.com
"At least 95 per cent successful for searching absolutely anything."
www.winfiles.com
"For the geek in me."
www.daftware.com
"Where I found a shareware version of Scrabble, among other games."

THE EDITOR
Name: Michael Rose (23)
Occupation: Editor, getoutthere.bt.com
Favourite sites:
www.google.com
"Absolutely, without a doubt, the best search engine around."
www.movietrak.com
"A genius blend of new (Internet) and old (postal service) technology. Blockbuster is dead!"
www.cainer.com
"Not great to look at, but the man's a genius."

THE DESIGNER
Name: Rupert Sliwa (26)
Occupation: Lead designer at Clockwork Web
Favourite sites:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/
"An obvious choice, but it's the site I visit the most – it does what it sets out to do exceptionally well."
www.volumeone.com/
"Inspirational design from a *Flash* genius."
www.bubblegun.com/
"Very entertaining. A lunchtime essential."

Reading's a dying pastime, or so we're told. Apparently, we'd all much rather be playing *Gran Turismo*, or constructing the ultimate killing machine for *Robot Wars*. Or even plotting the next bizarrely-named doomsday cult as an alternative to setting up a pension plan. Seventeen million Amazon.com customers, however, disagree.

The online store Amazon.com may have failed to make a profit since its inception in 1995, but its shares are among the most desirable on Wall Street (it now has bases in the US and Europe). Great things are expected of Amazon.com, but is it in danger of looking dull and dated before it's had a chance it prove its critics wrong?

We took three Amazon.com users who can find their way from eBay to Yahoo, filled them full of coffee and probed them for a very literary debate.

EN GUARDE

After an initial scuffle for control of the keyboard and a brief diversion round a very informative cheese site, Michael, Tom and Rupert are ready to consider Amazon.com, a bookmark that caters to the needs of thousands of Gen X-ers.

As befits an intellectual discussion in a coffee shop, the debate starts in a positive vein as Tom praises the search engine on Amazon's home page. A pretty obvious point, you might think, but users don't like to sit around waiting for a six-minute opening movie by someone who took *The Matrix* that bit too seriously.

Michael then compliments the filing-cabinet-style tabs at the top of the page, which provide links to Amazon's different departments. The first clash between interesting design and functionality rears its head when Michael shows a leaning towards the needs of all the Internet virgins out there, whereas Rupert and Tom favour a few more cymbals and bells.

Tom immediately takes an objection to the boxy appearance of the tabs, but Rupert is not so damning.

RUPERT: "The categories are quite easy to understand, there's very little in the way of having to delve too deep. It's also quite an intelligent site, so if you've been there before then, it recognises what you like and what you bought before. It makes suggestions when you've purchased something, so in terms of functionality it's pretty hot. In terms of the way it looks, though, it's just too 1996."

Michael shows the true debating spirit of agreeing before moving in for an attack:

MICHAEL: "That's a valid point, but because it's aimed at such a broad market, I think it has to cater for those using 256-colours; it also has to work on all sizes of monitors, as opposed to being all *Flash*-based."

RUPERT: "If Amazon simplified the design a bit, such as introducing more box-outs on different coloured backgrounds, it would make it easier to read."

MICHAEL: "At the end of the day, though, it's not offensive: it's for your mum and dad as well as your really hardcore person."

RUPERT: "I still think it makes more of the colours it has though..."

Anything else? Well, the size of the pages for starters.

TOM: "When you first call up the site, it doesn't fit the whole page, you still have to

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Photoshop Skills
Best techniques for print & publishing
XPress 5 —what's in it?
10 digi cameras · Illustrator 9
Web Skills—templates
50 advanced InDesign tips
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More from the new-look Website
www.computerarts.co.uk

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scroll down. The page is huge, and Amazon should make it easier to view. Most people don't even know to scroll windows. Being stupid, I've experienced this myself, and I don't like having to fanny around all the time on a Website."

MICHAEL: "But there are so many sections, you're not going to fit all of it on one page."

RUPERT: "What Amazon could do is create some kind of really clever *Flash* navigation system and make it downgradeable, so that those users who haven't got *Flash* could replace it with a gif version."

MICHAEL: "But then you're building two sites."

RUPERT: (rising to the evil glint now shining in Michael's eyes): "No, not really. You could put in a replacement gif using the same code as you did for *Flash*."

MICHAEL: "So why not just put in a good gif?"

RUPERT: "Well, for those who already have *Flash*, it adds another dimension. I don't mean it should be used for, say, content, but rather just as a more intelligent navigation system. So, for example, if you went to a different section, it would open up whole new layers relating to that section." He looks to Tom for moral and factual support.

TOM: "Like that Japanese Secret Garden site? That was great. (http://utenti.micronet.it/yenz/garden/garden.html)

MICHAEL: "Yes, but only in a look-at-it-once way. The whole point with the Amazon Website is that you go back to it."

TOUCHÉ

Before the conversation moves into the raised voices and heads-through-monitors stage of debate, Rupert is suddenly offended by a particularly dodgy cartoon cat.

RUPERT: "I think Amazon needs to hire a graphic artist, because the images it has at the moment look too amateurish. They're inconsistent, too: there are some cartoon-style bits of clip-art, and then some straight photos. They look cheesy, and the alignment's terrible in some of the picture boxes."

MICHAEL: "I'm a big fan of white space. I don't like the amount of text at all, but the links at the bottom are fine. Again, I'm thinking of the lower-end users. If a link is underlined in blue you know immediately what it is, whereas my dad would be lost with anything else. I know there's not many people who use non-graphical browsers, but they do exist."

RUPERT: "You could have it so that it changed to a different colour when it rolled over as well, or drop-down lists – that's very simple, just a five-minute job. The links can still be underlined, but they could be colour co-ordinated: for example, you could have Help indicated in red. They could also be grouped rather than taking up a huge swathe of the page."

MICHAEL: "I'm just thinking about people in libraries and the lowest common denominator, which is almost a swear word in design terms. I'm a big fan of making the Internet as easy to use and non-threatening as possible, especially with a site such as Amazon."

IMPROVEMENTS

So, we've discussed keeping the site simple, yet using some more whizzy *Flash* options. Now **create** photographer Tanya asks Tom what he would do to make Amazon.com more pleasing to the eye.

TOM: "When we do redesign the site, it will have to be fairly simple, especially with the move towards Web TV, Sky, OnDigital and so on which can't view stuff like *Flash*. As for content, there should be a facility to email postcards – for instance, book covers. Amazon doesn't make anything of that at all. You can always recommend books to friends, but it would be good to use the covers as they're often really well designed."

RUPERT: "I'd retain the essential elements of the branding, namely the colours. I'd also try to do something more with the logo, because although everyone recognises the name, I wouldn't say that everyone would recognise the logo. I agree with the use of white space, and it's vital on a site such as this where people just want to get to the information fast. However, you have to differentiate the white space from the boxes around it. Amazon needs to bring out the information that's most important.

"In terms of functionality and ideas, like wishlist and other people's reviews, Amazon leads the way. I think it's excellent, and it's great to read other users' book reviews before you buy. You can also find books you've never heard of. It's just a shame the site doesn't lead the way in design as well."

THE VERDICT

TOM: "It's bland as hell, and needs bolder colours and graphics."

RUPERT: "Good functionality, but crude to look at. Needs more personality and consistency – definitely more style sheets."

MICHAEL: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it. It's conservative, but then I think that's the point."

THE RESPONSE

JIM TODD, LEAD DESIGNER, AMAZON EUROPE

AND WHAT DO THE PEOPLE AT AMAZON HAVE TO SAY?

"Amazon's priority is to create the fastest loading and most easily navigable site possible, as most of our customers come to browse or buy products.

"All of the design is done in house, and the teams in the US and Europe work closely together. Consistency is very important, but the fact that our images are so varied can present problems. We have no plans for a redesign, although the sites are constantly modified according to the needs of the customers."

FAVOURITE SITES:

www.guardian.co.uk "They invest time in their story-related photo editing."

www.metadesign.com "Consistently clean work."

www.hoover.co.uk "Potentially boring topic made interesting, regardless of how you view it. I love "The land beneath your feet" section.

www.useit.com/ – "Lest we forget what we're doing." ■

TEXT: **KATHERINE DOGGRELL** /

PHOTOGRAPHY: **TANYA CHALKIN**

WITH THANKS TO: NET HOUSE INTERNET CAFÉ AT 138 MARYLEBONE ROAD, LONDON. **CALL 020 7224 7008** FOR DETAILS ON ITS 24-HOUR INTERNET ACCESS.

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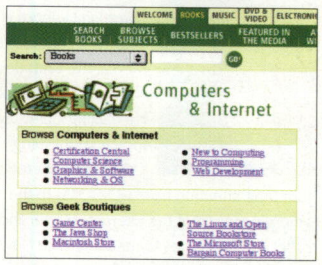

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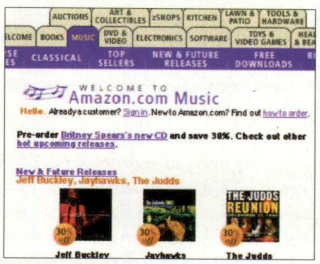
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THE JUDDS REUNION

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Name:	Martin Gittins
Age:	30
Job title:	Creative director
Company:	Interface New Media
Example of work:	www.iosh.co.uk
Fave project:	www.energise.co.uk (health education authority)
Goals for 2005:	"Work out how to use *Flash 8* and open an office in a space station orbiting Jupiter"

An underground cavern in Holborn is the base for Interface New Media, the Web design company that started life making CD-ROMs for IDG publishing.

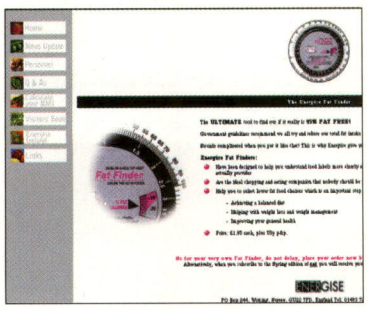
As clients started to turn their attention from CD-ROMs to the emerging world of the Internet, Martin and colleague Neil Jones formed Interface New Media with a £5,000 bank loan and an office full of rented equipment.

A lack of decent Web design courses led the duo to teach themselves from scratch: "We don't use any particular package to build our sites. Now people can learn how to use *Dreamweaver* in a few days and think they can call themselves Web designers. We create our own code because you get a lot of messy and unnecessary code with the big packages – which can give you a lot of problems later."

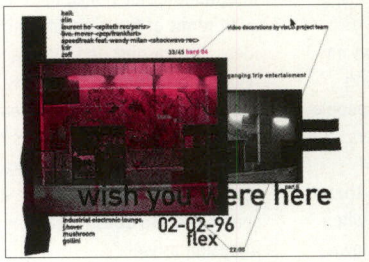
Interface now creates Websites for a selection of computer magazines, its current project being the redesign of *PC Advisor's* site. It's also taken some time to encourage young girls to exercise, on the Health Education Authority's site at www.energise.co.uk

"We found that working with the Health Education Authority and the Institute of Safety and Health (www.iosh.co.uk) was more interesting than you might think. Not only is it a good service, but the chat forums it runs on the sites spawn some really heated intellectual discussions. More so than a lot of other sites."

Martin and Neil have so far declined outside investment in favour of retaining full control of the company, allowing them to pursue their own projects. Whether it's this freedom or a lack of sunlight in the office that inspired them, plans are afoot for Interface to be the first team to launch a print magazine off the back of a Website. Watch this space.



Shape up and get fit at www.energise.co.uk



DEXTRO

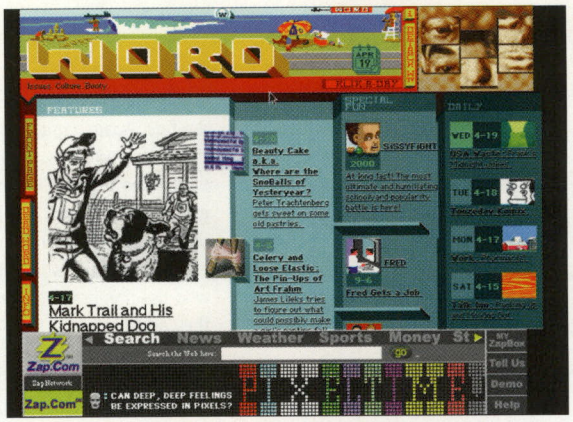
www.dextro.org

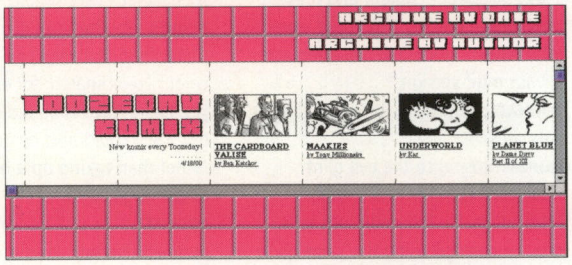
Flash oddities from foreign shores: it's not all cuckoo clocks, y'know.

"It's just a wild and wacky site, created by this mad Austrian bloke creating the most mad *Shockwave* movies – he also does one called turux.org. They're not commercial at all, they're just arty sites," comments Martin.

"What originally attracted me to the Internet was this idea that you could just express yourself online. It's only in the last three years that commercial concerns have come onto the Web."

Bite ***Flash* art from before Amazon dragged big business onto the Web.**





WORD

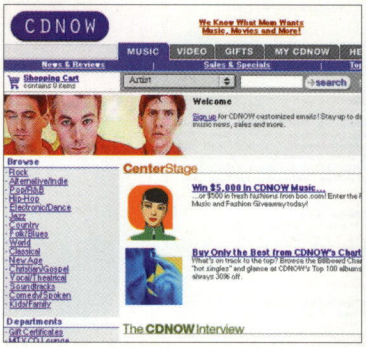
www.word.com

The equivalent of an artist's loft online, with contributions welcomed from all. "It's basically an online magazine, but there's quite a lot of weird stuff on it," says Martin. "It's not just design, it's content too – there's a lot of good quality writing there. It's obviously been designed for the Web too, as it's not just an online version of the magazine. The writing isn't a huge wad of text either, it's placed over several screens which makes it a good Web read.

"I love online magazines, it's just a shame there's no money for them. A lot of magazines tried to bring in subscription, but it just never works. Their primary objective here seems to be creativity rather than just to make money – although the main aim is obviously to extend the brand.

"Things like discussion forums on Websites are a great way of creating a community behind your publication, far stronger than a magazine on its own could ever do. In a discussion, you can go into great depth and post lots of questions that you don't have the space or time to do with a magazine. Even with a basic magazine site, you can improve it by just by having a search capacity for reviews. I think the challenge will be to find other ways to make revenue than subscription or banner ads."

Bite **An online magazine where design is as important as content.**



CDNOW

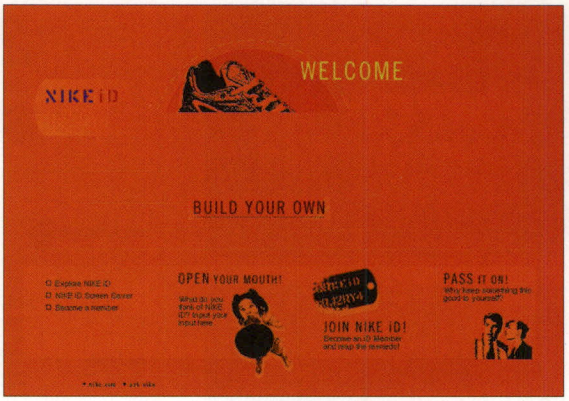
www.cdnow.com

Here's a CD store that's taken over the US, but has yet to capture the hearts and pockets of Europe.

"I've bought CDs from here, but it's also a fantastic research tool," offers Martin. "If you want to find out about bands, it has all the biographies and related artists. If you've heard of a band, you can hear them before you buy here. The site's also well put together, with MP3 samples and the like. It's quite clean and it's now more popular than Amazon.

"The company was far too late launching in Europe though, and let companies like dot.music in. It could have cleaned up in Europe if it had launched earlier, but I think the moment may have passed. A recent Anderson Consulting report recommended it just give up."

Bite **Not just CDs – you can impress with your obscure Oasis facts too.**



NIKE

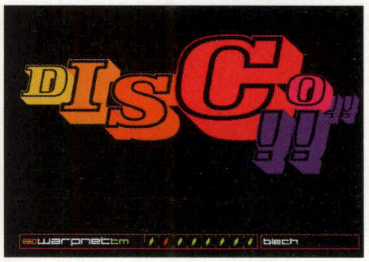
www.nike.com

Just do it – one of the world's most recognisable brands takes a few risks on its online empire, including enabling you to create your own trainers.

"I like the way it's not just one big site – there are lots of microsites. From a creative point of view it's good, because there were a lot of different agencies used and it didn't have to conform to a corporate look. It's good to be able to compare what everyone did. There's also a lot of odd little bits like a site where you can create movies and send them to people, stuff that's not necessarily related to sports.

"When you compare it with something like Boo.com, where the company obviously had no idea what it was doing, it's quite impressive. Nice presentation, but just doesn't deliver customers. Although we did nick the idea of a virtual guide from Boo for the Energise site..."

Bite **Sofa fitness never looked so good – and you can even create your very own trainers.**



WARP RECORDS

www.warprecords.com

Inspirational site for aspiring designers featuring pseudo government warnings on the dangers of dancing. Oh, and you can buy records.

"It's not just 'here's our record, here's our bands'. Because the company only puts out a couple of records a month, it puts everything into it, so every release feels like an event to get excited about – which is reflected on the site. It uses Designers' Republic for the cover art, and the same high design values are present all across the site as well," says Martin.

"It's a site for designers, mostly *Flash* stuff, and it's all very experimental which is what the Web's there for. It shouldn't just be there for companies to sell stuff on; there should be room to explore ideas and exchange information. It's all really off the wall – it's not just spinning logos.

"I used to do a lot of fanzines and the like and I'm a fan of the idea that anyone can publish information. There's no reason why some guy at home doing little *Flash* animations can't get as much publicity as *Wired*."

Bite **There's still room on the Web for the little guy.**

"WARP RECORDS IS A SITE FOR DESIGNERS, AND IT'S ALL VERY EXPERIMENTAL WHICH IS WHAT THE WEB IS THERE FOR"

MARTIN GITTINS

Name:	Adrian Day
Age:	33
Job title:	Graphic designer
Company:	Freelance
Example of work:	www.dk.com – currently working on it
Fave project:	"*Drowned God* game for Time Warner Interactive – I did some animated tarot cards"
Goals for 2005:	"To be one of a successful team of artists"

Adrian Day has managed to achieve an enviable position in the world of design; alternating between full-time and contract design work, surviving a nasty moment when he returned from two years travelling to find that everyone had moved from designing on paper to using computers.

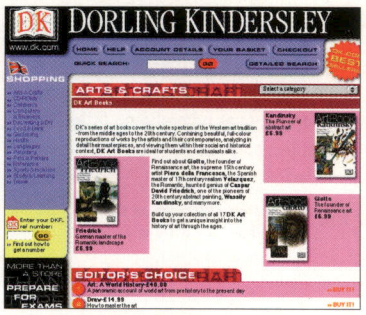
Adrian trained as a graphic designer before honing his skills working for the likes of Jaguar, producing advertising and promotional material, which has coloured his approach to the Web.

"Being a designer, I look at things in a more aesthetic way," he says. "I do think you need to keep people interested: you're making them look at something as a collective that you can't get in a book, and that's the main thing that draws people to a Website.

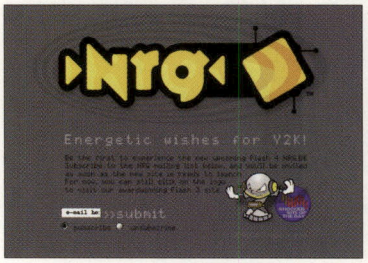
"Unfortunately, I took a break to travel and by the time I came back, computers had really come in. Within two years everybody had computers and it was a struggle to get work."

However, moving with the times Adrian retrained in Computer Applications at Carmathen University in South West Wales, and he hasn't looked back since.

A dozen years later, Adrian has worked in nearly all aspects of design, ranging from cell animation to full blown CD-ROM applications. He's currently working on the redesign for publishing house Dorling Kindersley's Website. Why it couldn't just stick with fuzzy felt, we'll never know.



DK's site is receiving Adrian's full attention.

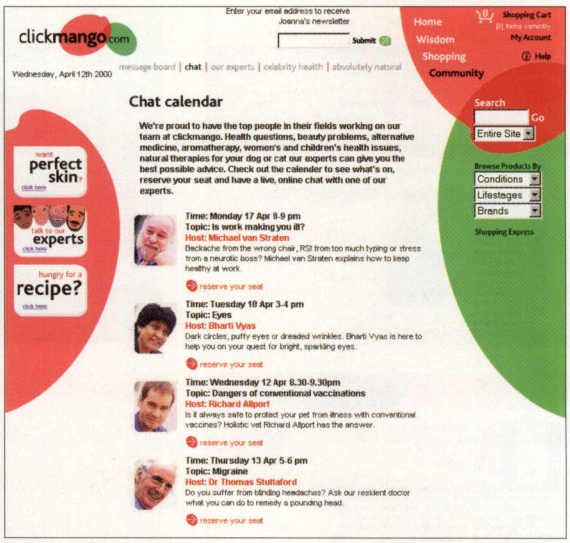


NRG

www.nrg.be

This site boasts cool graphics and slick motion. "I've heard a lot of people relate to this as a favourite Website," comments Adrian. "When you look at it, the beginning has a nice little 3D rotating logo, which was done in 1997 and at the time it seemed so different compared to what everyone else was doing. If you look at most Websites, they're very flat and that's why people are really turning onto using *Flash*. It gives a lot of life to what would otherwise just be a formatted page."

Bite **Started in 1994, this site shows you how to grab punters' attention and make them stay.**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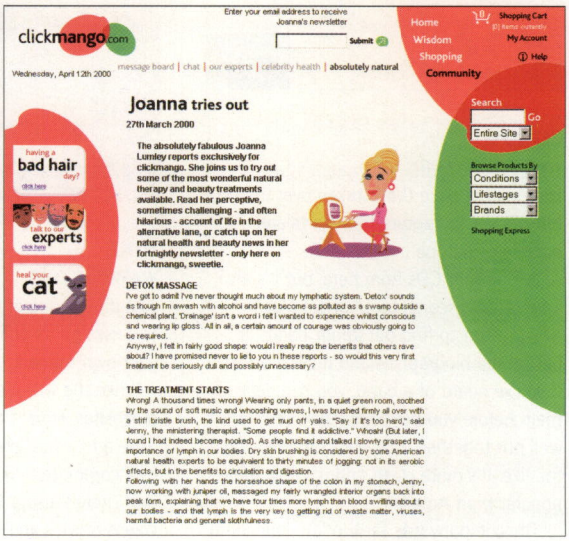
Enter your email address to receive Joanna's newsletter
Submit
Wednesday, April 12th 2000
message board | chat | our experts | celebrity health | absolutely natural
Home
Wisdom
Shopping
Community
Shopping Cart
My Account
Help
Search
Go
Entire Site
Browse Products By
Conditions
Lifestages
Brands
Shopping Express
Chat calendar
We're proud to have the top people in their fields working on our team at clickmango. Health questions, beauty problems, alternative medicine, aromatherapy, women's and children's health issues, natural therapies for your dog or cat our experts can give you the best possible advice. Check out the calender to see what's on, reserve your seat and have a live, online chat with one of our experts.
want perfect skin?
talk to our experts
hungry for a recipe?
Time: Monday 17 Apr 8-9 pm
Topic: Is work making you ill?
Host: Michael van Straten
Backache from the wrong chair, RSI from too much typing or stress from a neurotic boss? Michael van Straten explains how to keep healthy at work.
reserve your seat
Time: Tuesday 18 Apr 3-4 pm
Topic: Eyes
Host: Bharti Vyas
Dark circles, puffy eyes or dreaded wrinkles. Bharti Vyas is here to help you on your quest for bright, sparkling eyes.
reserve your seat
Time: Wednesday 12 Apr 8.30-9.30pm
Topic: Dangers of conventional vaccinations
Host: Richard Allport
Is it always safe to protect your pet from illness with conventional vaccines? Holistic vet Richard Allport has the answer.
reserve your seat
Time: Thursday 13 Apr 5-6 pm
Topic: Migraine
Host: Dr Thomas Stuttaford
Do you suffer from blinding headaches? Ask our resident doctor what you can do to remedy a pounding head.
reserve your seat


clickmango.com
Enter your email address to receive Joanna's newsletter
Submit
Wednesday, April 12th 2000
message board | chat | our experts | celebrity health | absolutely natural
Home
Wisdom
Shopping
Community
Shopping Cart
My Account
Help
Search
Go
Entire Site
Browse Products By
Conditions
Lifestages
Brands
Shopping Express
Joanna tries out
27th March 2000
having a bad hair day?
talk to our experts
heal your cat
The absolutely fabulous Joanna Lumley reports exclusively for clickmango. She joins us to try out some of the most wonderful natural therapy and beauty treatments available. Read her perceptive, sometimes challenging - and often hilarious - account of life in the alternative lane, or catch up on her natural health and beauty news in her fortnightly newsletter - only here on clickmango, sweetie.
DETOX MASSAGE
I've got to admit I've never thought much about my lymphatic system. 'Detox' sounds as though I'm awash with alcohol and have become so polluted as a swamp outside a chemical plant. 'Drainage' isn't a word I felt I wanted to experience whilst conscious and wearing lip gloss. All in all, a certain amount of courage was obviously going to be required.
Anyway, I felt in fairly good shape: would I really reap the benefits that others rave about? I have promised never to lie to you in these reports - so would this very first treatment be seriously dull and possibly unnecessary?
THE TREATMENT STARTS
Wrong! A thousand times wrong! Wearing only pants, in a quiet green room, soothed by the sound of soft music and whooshing waves, I was brushed firmly all over with a stiff bristle brush, the kind used to get mud off yaks. "Say if it's too hard," said Jenny, the ministering therapist. "Some people find it addictive." Whoah! (But later, I found I had indeed become hooked). As she brushed and talked I slowly grasped the importance of lymph in our bodies. Dry skin brushing is considered by some American natural health experts to be equivalent to thirty minutes of jogging: not in its aerobic effects, but in the benefits to circulation and digestion.
Following with her hands the horseshoe shape of the colon in my stomach, Jenny, now working with juniper oil, massaged my fairly wrangled interior organs back into peak form, explaining that we have four times more lymph than blood swilling about in our bodies - and that lymph is the very key to getting rid of waste matter, viruses, harmful bacteria and general slothfulness.

CLICKMANGO

www.clickmango.com

ClickMango is a health site: but while you're debating just how healthy it is trying to get mended while hunched over a desk, getting RSI and a tan from that monitor you should have chucked years ago, Adrian sees it from the aesthetic point of view.

"I know there's a lot of these sites around, like thinknatural.com, but what I like about this one is it's a clean Website, with nice use of colour and it works really quickly. It's great because even though it's a shop, it doesn't hit you straight away. It also has a great deal of celebrity articles and some cool little animations like those of Joanna Lumley. You can click here, read her article, and then place it into a document and email it onto friends who might be interested too."

Bite **Chat to experts online; clickmango delivers what the others don't.**

MYWAPWORLD

www.mywapworld.com

By next year (after the bidders have finished spending more than the national debt of most countries on the licensing rights), the UK will see a revolution in what can be done with your jumped up walkie-talkie.

MyWapWorld shows you the way: "The site takes a section of London (Soho) and shows it as a map," says Adrian. "It's done in a clubby sort of way, with good use of colour. It's simple but in your face."

The site integrates with your mobile phone to send you details of what to do and where to go, and it even sends a message to your mate's phones telling them where and what time you want to meet. The concept is new to the UK, but Adrian can see it going far: "It's a Website that's going to transfer all over the country, all over the planet: it's a commodity that other people haven't cottoned on to yet."

Bite **Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) – an entire Website designed around a mobile phone protocol. If you live in London and fancy a pint, MyWapWorld shows you where.**

ATTIK

www.attik.com

"I've made reference to The Attik's design and graphics over the years," says Adrian. "I remember first seeing the company at a conference in 1995, and it didn't just speak or give a talk. It turned up with flyers but they weren't just ordinary flyers: they were A1 folded, with all its designs in a collage – really different and really radical. I often look at The Attik's stuff and then see other people mimicking its ideas right across the board.

"I like the company's Website because it's not a visual thing in terms of big brash pictures: it uses text in a really nice simple way and that's what's so good about it."

Bite **Stark design and original concepts sets The Attik apart from the rest – the company sees way beyond *Flash*.**

tubehell
the commuter and make their life easier and more fulfilling. The site got massive attention and New Media Age's usually critical site inspection praised the "unforgettable logo" and called it a "cool looking site". Original branding, programming and design by us, the site design has now been taken inhouse.
portfolio
kerb

KERB

www.kerb.co.uk

Kerb is a Brighton-based company, probably most well known for its work on Tubehell (www.tubehell.co.uk), where the horned train reveals amusing stories to help you forget about the 8:50 armpit express. "The company uses a great deal of Japanese-style artwork, and it does fantastic *Flash*-animated Websites."

Adrian continues: "Kerb did a really cool *Flash* animation of a guy break-dancing for Pepsi. I think it's got to the stage now where people are realising the absolute potential of what you can do. Websites are now full of motion-animation where it's like watching a cartoon, animated games in *Flash* and the like. All these elements are being incorporated into Kerb's sites which gives them much more impact. I've worked with drawn animation and film, and *Flash* is the next step; as soon as you do something, it's there for people to see it."

Bite **Brighton-based Kerb has a distinct Japanese style that creates images to remember.**

"I'VE WORKED WITH DRAWN ANIMATION AND FILM, AND FLASH IS THE NEXT STEP. AS SOON AS YOU DO SOMETHING, IT'S THERE FOR PEOPLE TO SEE"

ADRIAN DAY

Name:	Jude Samuel
Age:	29
Job title:	Senior multimedia designer
Company:	Accent Interactive (www.accent.co.uk)
Example of work:	www.rmg.com
Fave project:	www.cwlondon.com
Goals for 2005:	"To be setting the standards for new media"

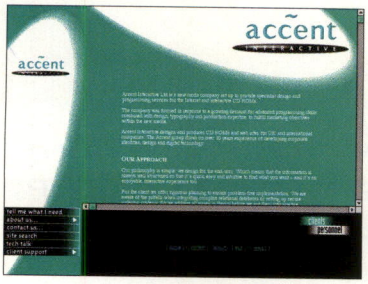
Accent's Jude Samuel is a fast mover. He's been with the graphics company now for four years – about the same length of time as he's been involved with multimedia – and is off soon, to the position of Art director at Quidnunc. But four years in any one place in this business is, as Jude says, a long time.

Before gainful employ at Accent, however, Jude worked for courier company Interlink: first as a fork lift driver in the warehouse, to leaving, a few years later, as depot manager. So why and, more importantly how, do you leap from courier services to Internet design?

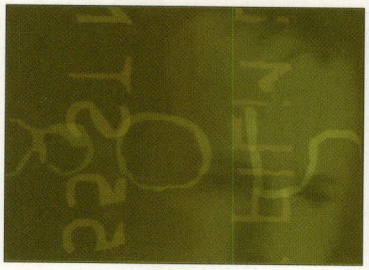
Jude smiles: "I studied art at school and maintained a huge interest in it throughout my career. I just decided one day to make the jump into multimedia and it worked out pretty well." Nothing else? Study time? Formal qualifications? "Well, I read loads and loads of books, bought myself a machine and got a domain name, then took stuff home and practiced really hard. I learnt a great deal."

And what has that taught him about the Accent Website? There's a long pause for this one. "It's a bit dire," he says. "Although it's undergoing a revamp at the moment, the Accent site has remained pretty much unchanged since the day it was first uploaded, just over four years ago."

Accent was formed twelve years ago by three partners, two of whom were at Conran together and all from a strong graphics design background. Which is why Jude never tinkered with the homepage. "Company politics," he confirms. "It would be different if the company was started by people who weren't in the business, but they are. So I actually refused to do it." What Jude didn't refuse to do, however, was guide us through his current five favourite Websites.



Accent's homepage is undergoing a revamp.



HILLMAN CURTIS

www.hillmancurtis.com

Hillman Curtis is a New York City-based designer. His company has created oodles of cool sites, interfaces and motion graphics for a slew of funky companies, including the likes of Macromedia, Lycos, SonicNet, ShockRave and Razorfish. The Website, deceptively simple at first, actually has much going on within.

"It's done a lot with *Flash*," confirms Jude. "But what the site did before anyone else was incorporate video footage within *Flash*, but not by using the video – by cutting it into the imagery and making it a part of *Flash*... As a bonus, this really speeds things up – it even indicates some fairly accurate download times with its work, which is great because you don't want to wait too long to coo over all those slick visuals. Being the award-winner that it is, it's still really pushing boundaries. Can you get me an interview?"

Bite **Deceptively simple at first, there's loads going on here, especially if you love to drool over cool motion graphics.**

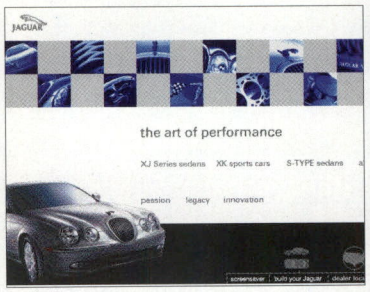
2ADVANCED

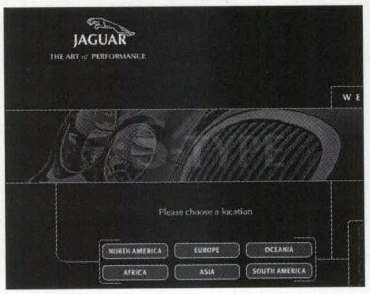
www.2advanced.com

This is another design agency, but one that appears to be snapping at the heels of Hillman Curtis – especially in terms of *Flash*, which is what the site's mainly made from.

"It's done really innovative things with *Flash* and with the coding, and it's pretty cool too," says Jude. "The site, or *Flash 4* enhanced interactive portfolio machine, has a chic, sleek, more-minimal-than-thou homepage – but it gives way to a series of cutting edge visuals, overlaid with a trippy-dippy soundtrack that's more performance art than portfolio. What makes 2Advanced special is that it's done it in a much shorter time than Hillman Curtis. Curtis has a better client list, but 2Advanced has better design. It's that and the navigation that really stand out."

Bite **A more-minimal-than-thou design that gives way to some funky visuals. Designers everywhere take heed.**





JAGUAR

www.us.jaguar.com

"This is a really good retail site as the technology used makes things so much easier for the end user. Cars aren't easy to buy online, but what Jaguar does is enable you to choose from its range," stresses Jude.

Yeah yeah, but what about the car building – tell me about the car building. "Jaguar enables you to build your own car. You can select a model, choose the interior and even click on a range of colour swatches and apply them to the body." Yes. Building your own jag is very, no *extremely* cool.

"And it's all done without using *Flash*," adds Jude. "*Flash* is the easy way out, but Jaguar uses JavaScript and HTML. It also uses ASP, which calculates how much you're spending and what your budget is." As yet, however, Jude has resisted the temptation to buy a car online.

Bite **Jaguar enables you to build your own car online and then buy it. Thumbs up.**

COOLHOMEPAGES

www.coolhomepages.com

Billed as "the only known cure for writers block," the plain but useful Coolhomepages.com lists the very best of what's out there.

"It's a portal," explains Jude. "You submit a site you've worked on and it adds it to its database." And all the sites are broken down by category, so the navigation is made simple.

"It's an excellent learning site. If you don't know how to do something, you can come here and find it here. I come here about once a week." That's a lot of designers block isn't it?

"Huh? Oh, ha ha," says Jude.

If you're really stuck, there's even a message board, but visitors don't seem to use it much. "They should, because there's more to this site than just stealing bits of code," adds Jude. Be warned, however: if you submit your site, it may not go quite where you think it should. Just hope that you don't end up in the section entitled 'Worst homepages ever'.

Bite **Click here to find a plethora of good sites, and a selection of the worst.**

Sponsored by iparty.com we sell fun.
SESAME STREET Goes to the Doctor
FREE VIDEO!
Tell me more!
GAMES
STORIES
WEB WONDERS
ACTIVITIES
FOOD
JOIN IN
LEARNING
PRINTABLES
CTW family workshop
May 25, 2000
search
Privacy Policy
Preschool
Parents
Kids
Baby & You
Sesame Street
Go on a Make-a-Story beach adventure with Grover!
Dragon Tales
Memorable Weekend Mini-Trips!
Make-a-Bug
Kids go buggy over bug crafts.
Challenge your kids with the latest sticker scavenger hunt.
Who's our lucky sweepstakes winner? Check your child's Sticker World message box.
Born to Read Why reading to babies makes a difference!
Tune in to your dreams to predict the sex of your baby.
Summer of Snuffy Spike Lee calls the shots on Sesame Street tomorrow.
Who do you want to play with today?
Big Bird
Have you tickled Elmo today?
PRESCHOOL PLAYGROUND
PARENTS TOOLBOX
KID CITY
BABY WORKSHOP
SESAME STREET CENTRAL
JOIN IN OUR DISCUSSIONS!
New member ecreamer writes:
Hi everyone, I wanted to introduce myself. I am new to this site. I have twin girls, who will be five on Monday. They will start school this year, and that breaks my heart. They grow up to fast. This site seems very dedicated to parents and children, which is refreshing to this sufer.
Welcome to the Neighborhood
NOGGIN
for more kid stuff
As featured on Cool Site of the Day

THE CHILDREN'S TELEVISION WORKSHOP

www.ctw.org

"My ethical option. I don't really go there, but I have to commend the site. You get so much shit on the Web, but this is just so good."

Jude's final choice is another portal, and one that plugs *Sesame Street* relentlessly – well it does make the thing. "It's made for kids, but it's also geared towards new and young mothers," continues Jude. "It's bright, colourful and informative – and above all, it's safe. You can even go there to find out what kids should eat, what's good for them and what's bad. You've got your Mothercare and your Boots, but there isn't a place quite like this one."

Bite **Welcome to the sunny side of the e-street, where baby becomes boss.**

"HILLMAN CURTIS HAS CREATED A SLEW OF COOL SITES, DOES A LOT WITH FLASH AND IS ALWAYS PUSHING NEW BOUNDARIES"

JUDE SAMUEL

Name:	Alex Griffin
Age:	21
Job title:	Graphic/Web designer
Company:	Deepend (deepend.co.uk)
Example of work:	www.houseoffraser.com
Fave project:	www.viaduct.co.uk
Goals for 2005:	"To have my own percussion site which will be interactive and a bit different"

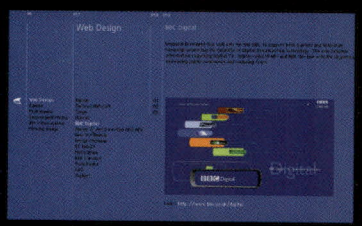
Founded in 1994 by two friends with backgrounds in industrial design, Deepend is a company offering 'expertise across the spectrum of digital media, creative design and production.' The name 'Deepend' came when the two founding partners were stuck for a name for the company and happened to be in a swimming pool at the time. They looked up and hence Deepend was born.

The Deepend Group in the UK now has 90-plus staff working on projects in the areas of 3D, Web, multimedia and games development, moving image, and events production. The convergent media also deals with digital TV and WAP technologies.

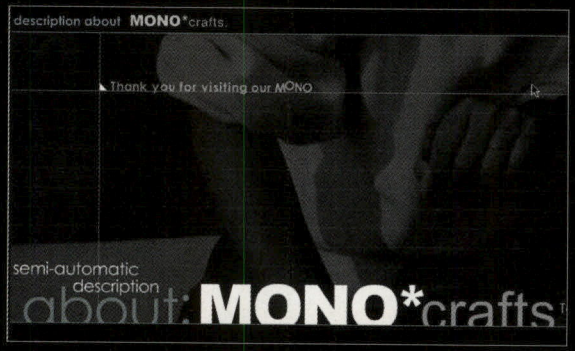
Alex's talent first shone through when he won the Royal Society of Arts prize while studying for his degree in Visual Communications. Following this, he was spotted by the creative director of Deepend and offered a job as a designer.

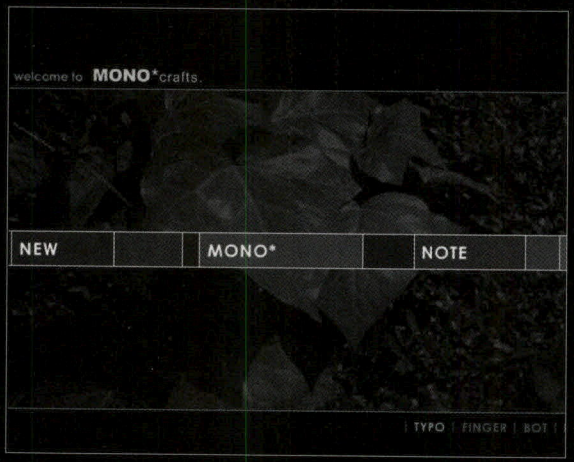
"Everything happened at once," he says. "To say it was a good year is a massive understatement." And he's certainly landed on his feet – Deepend's clients include Microsoft, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Reuters and Sony.

"It's strange because we do such a large variety of projects," explains Alex. "One minute we could be doing a free Website for a wheelchair company, and the next we'll be working on a project for House Of Fraser. The most bizarre time was when we did a project for a jam manufacturer, and it actually paid us in jam."



The front-end of Deepend in all its glory.





YUGOP

www.yugop.com

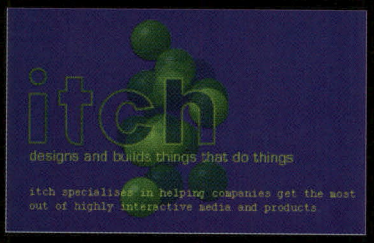
Created by a designer called Yugo, this is a site made by a designer for designers. It boasts innovative graphics and interaction, and a visit to the site enables you to play with moving images such as spinning cubes with numbers.

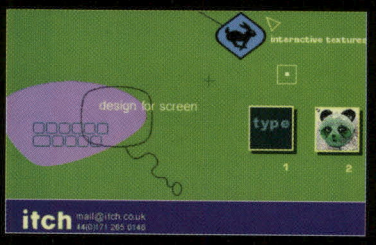
"When Macromedia released *Flash 4*, it opened up a whole lot of possibilities for the design of Websites. This is a great combination of very good design and scripting," Alex explains. "It's not a site for the lazy, as its scalable images encourage you to explore, rather than waiting for the right places to click on." Although yugop.com fully utilises the capabilities of animation such as *Flash*, its theme isn't highly ostentatious – the graphics are created in low-key colours, for example.

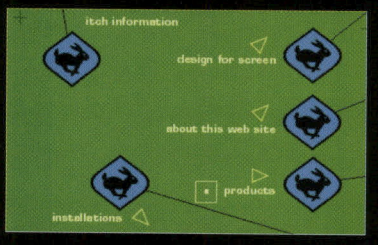
Alex thinks that Yugop is at the forefront of new innovation in both design and development: "This guy has created all these new ideas and is putting them out for other people to see, but there's no way that other designers could really use them as he's obviously the first to come up with such interesting stuff. The scripts involved are really quite impressive."

Even the guest book on this site is completely in a league of its own; it has the appearance of a keyboard, which, when you type in a letter, shows it flying from the key to settle at the top gradually building up a line of text. Truly a site to marvel at for an interesting presentation of images.

Bite **Impressive new ideas with graphics, pushing the envelope of mouse interaction.**


itch
designs and builds things that do things
itch specialises in helping companies get the most out of highly interactive media and products





ITCH

www.itch.co.uk

The site for London-based design company Itch is different and eye catching, mainly due to its unique layout. The scalable landscape enables you to navigate to links by following the trail and zooming in on icons containing info about Itch, examples of projects, games and other pieces of the company. Expect bouncing bunnies and beetles to hound you around the screen.

"Although not the best site from a graphics point of view, it's different in its unique navigation, which no other Website has thought of," says Alex. "The landscape would also make it very easy to add other links and icons: just create another trail."

All of which goes to show that you can be innovative when it comes to linking Web pages together. Could this be a precedent-setter for new generation sites?

Bite **Simplicity in graphics combined with innovative page navigation demonstrates that you can visit the site in your own unique way.**

SHOCKFUSION

www.shockfusion.com

"This has been around for quite some time, and again is based around the community of Web designers," says Alex.

The site is almost a sounding board for the people who want to learn more about Web design, how to master a particular skill, and for the more experienced designers out there too.

Alex comments: "People go on here with examples of their work and you'll get feedback on whether it's good or bad. Occasionally you get a real slagging off, but at least it's good to know what people think. Along the same lines, newbies can ask more experienced designers how to solve a problem or how to improve their skills."

Taking this concept of helping the Web community become just that, Shockfusion will no doubt be a successful breeding ground for future new ideas.

Bite **A real sounding board, Shockfusion will continue to unite Web developers and designers in their ideas for creating and inspiring the Web of the future.**

NETBABYWORLD

www.netbabyworld.com

Netbabyworld is not unlike the variety of offerings which can be found on shockwave.com, but there's a mite more cleverness in the site which has an overall theme.

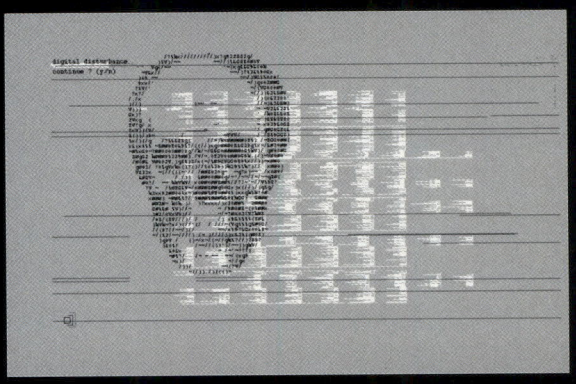
"What people have done is designed games, shopping, a virtual town, icons and all sorts of other themes, then put them together to form a kind of community," says Alex.

You can go onto the site and choose a character to represent yourself or create your own, and each character or 'citizen' has its own profile. The games on the site are simple but humorous, and the site screams of in-depth development ideas.

"The whole idea is that there's this town which has been built, and it's more of a cult thing. For example, you can buy your own Netbaby if you want to, and stickers to go on your keyboard. It's that type of thing that makes you want to come back," explains Alex.

With a few other ideas in the pipeline for games and new themes, Netbabyworld looks set to entertain for a good while yet.

Bite **With its fun and funky layout, plus the ability to choose your own character, Netbabyworld has created its own Web community.**



SOULBATH

www.soulbath.co.uk

Designed in system grey colour, or the 'beauty of greyscale' as it's described by the site itself, Soulbath has been created with designers in mind, although the entertaining-but-simple eye candy would be interesting to most people. Alex chips in: "It's going against conventions, but has a tongue-in-cheek approach."

One example of this is demonstrated when the site loads: it gives you an image of a T-Rex and then a dialogue box asks: 'Did I scare you?' When loaded, you can visit different links. One is a grid of squares which changes shape as you run your mouse over it; and another link warns you about the evilness of banner adverts, inviting you to click on one, and then chastising you for doing so.

Soulbath.com is best described as an experimental Website and, currently on volume one, it promises to change its appearance three or four times a year. Alex is looking forward to the next one – what weird and humorous ideas will they think of next?

Bite **One of the most funny and experimental sites available, Soulbath uses *Flash* and *Shockwave* to create simple yet entertaining graphics – you'll want to play for hours.**

"ALTHOUGH ITCH IS NOT THE BEST SITE FROM A GRAPHICS POINT OF VIEW, IT DIFFERS IN ITS UNIQUE NAVIGATION, WHICH NO OTHER WEBSITE HAS THOUGHT OF"

ALEX GRIFFIN

Hit miss or_maybe

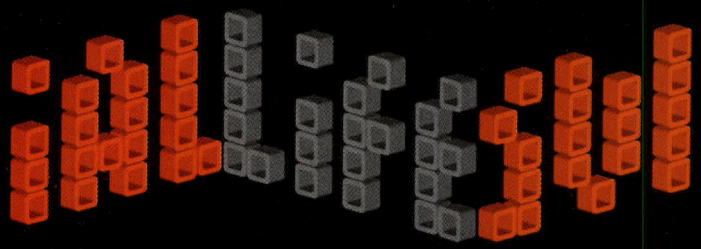
THREE DESIGNERS SNAP UP THE CHANCE TO PASS THEIR COMMENTS ON A WEBSITE. DESIGN, CONTENT, NAVIGATION: HOW DOES WWW.SOCIALLIFESUPPORT.COM FARE?

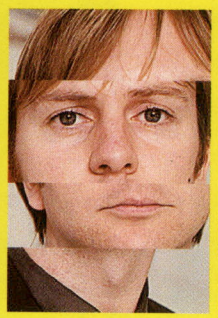
While most Websites choose to promote their products in a straightforward fashion, www.sociallifesupport.com has opted for a rather different approach.

Designed and developed for Motorola to promote its new WAP presence and Shark R WAP phone, the site combines eye-catching graphics with a selection of games targeting users in their teens to early 20s. The site is intended to be a contrast to its more serious business-orientated content on the Web, and as such the angle is more youth lifestyle with a fresh and 'fun' theme.

Boasting games such as *Donut Race* (a police chase), *Jay's Sampladelic Mix Thing* (where you can remix your own sound samples), *Krazee Speaker Stax* (a jigsaw-type arrangement), and *Skating Game*, which involves skateboarding along the pavement avoiding various obstacles, the content is wide and varied.

If we go with the theory that everybody enjoys playing games, the site should prove very popular. However, the question remains: is this enough in itself for future users? Or is it just another games site like all the others? We put it to the test...





Name: Jonathan Vaughan
Company: Axcess.com
Position: Creative director
History: Started in traditional print design. Joined Axcess to head up its online branding and creative department
Latest project: Online branding and Websites for a San Francisco software company
Finest project: Travel Insurance (Insureandgo.com)

JONATHAN BEGINS: "My initial impression was that the site seemed to be very well thought-out, and although the 3D concept using *Flash* has been used before, this execution appears fresh. Its main page with animated squares was impressive but I quickly lost interest – exploring is all very well, but it gets very annoying when it's not clear how the navigation system works, or if they've even got one. The only clue is a row of circles which look as though you should click on them, but if you do click on them, nothing happens. Pointless. Clicking randomly soon lost its excitement for me."

And what about the content? "The main theme of the site is based on play and interactivity, and I get the feeling that in getting caught up with this, the ability to present structure and content has been lost. Although it's a youth-driven lifestyle site, it would still benefit from more information about its WAP service, and the ideas behind it all.

"In future, it should start expanding its content to include more than games to persuade users to return to the site, as at the moment there's just no incentive at all. The hidden 'stuff inside things' suggests the developers have their tongues firmly in their cheeks, which gives an indication of what may come.

"I think there's an element of 1970s imagery within the site, and this is reflected in the style of the games, fonts and use of vocabulary. They're particularly reminiscent of the type of culture at the time – a bit loud and garish and brightly coloured. It will probably be a hit with the young hip crowd, but we'll see how the site develops."

Best design feature: "A very attractive and 'finished' interface"
Worst design feature: "Terrible navigation"
Rating: Maybe

Name: Richard Carter
Company: Binary Vision
Position: Senior Web designer
History: Degree in media before joining Binary Vision
Latest project: An interactive CD-ROM and presentation package for a pharmaceutical company
Finest project: The National Health Authority (www.lovelife/hea.org.uk)

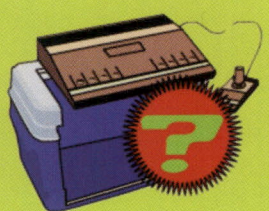
RICHARD COMMENTS: "I think the front-end on the opening page is very cute and there's some good animation too, which is its strongest point. The problem is it needs to indicate those games that have already been visited; perhaps a game title that appears on rollover so that the user knows what they're choosing and where they've been. I spent a while going back and forth from each selection trying to navigate my way round.

"The *Chain Reactor* game was so bad that initially I thought it didn't work, but after a long period a 'Play' button appeared. But why would you want to play this game when it's got such a long download time and you've probably seen a hundred and one *Tetris* rip-offs before? Content is king.

"There obviously hasn't been a great deal of testing put into this site. I found that with *Netscape*, the windows were too large for the game and they hadn't even bothered to centre the *Shockwave* game. Very poor."

Richard continues: "The name of the site is more suited to an online *Time Out*-type culture and listings magazine, it doesn't reflect its content at all. Also, the site is far from social, as it contains some really unoriginal single-player games. If I had a social life to support, I certainly wouldn't go here. It's loosely termed a 'youth' site, but I think that the youth of today are completely computer- and Internet-savvy. For that reason, sociallifesupport.com will find itself swamped by better sites, games consoles such as Dreamcast and the PlayStation, and PCs with multiplayer capabilities. Why would anyone choose this site? You tell me!"

Best design feature: "The main interface has strong graphics"
Worst design feature: "Unoriginal content, poorly tested for playability"
Rating: Miss



Name: Paul Sonley
Company: Razorfish
Position: Senior designer
History: Worked as a print designer before moving to Web design
Latest project: Exploring how design translates between Web/WAP/TV platforms
Finest project: NatWest (www.natwest.com)

PAUL SAYS: "This site has an interesting design, I like the stacks of 3D-style moving boxes which move around with a mouse click. It's also a well-designed page, particularly the use of *Flash* animation which spells out the name of the site in boxes. That's quite clever and it's not something that's immediately noticeable. However, the main problem is that although it has a colour-coded guide to the sections, it doesn't provide any functionality, it's not clear what the sections do. Also, there's no text on the site to tell you what it's doing, nor is there any information on the product.

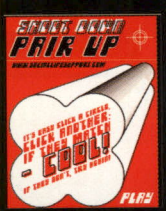
"The games are messy as well, and they're neither challenging or original enough. You can find the same games anywhere on the Internet. I think it's trying to look at club life and skate and music culture, but in a twee way. I mean, it has a version of *Tetris* called *Chain Reactor*, which is something we've seen over and over again. It's almost childlike, and a bit condescending really. I think it's competing with an older, more gritty market, and there it just fails.

"Although the games are simple enough to play with the arrow keys on your keyboard, they're lacking the ingredient that is going to make people want to go back. There's absolutely no replay ability, no rewards, not even a high score table. There's nothing at all to create a sense of community, so what is it trying to do? I'm certainly not going to bother visiting it again."

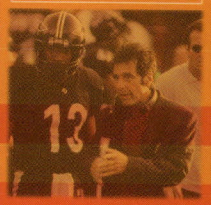
Pulling no punches, Paul concludes: "The design could be improved in lots of areas. Some games use less than a third of a window, so why do we have to launch a huge ugly window? The font is also old-fashioned. It's a solid image but there's no freshness. It's very badly thought out." ■

Best design feature: "The *Flash* interface is great fun"
Worst design feature: "The navigation is terrible"
What it needs: "More information and more replay ability"
Rating: Miss

TEXT: **DEBBIE ORR**

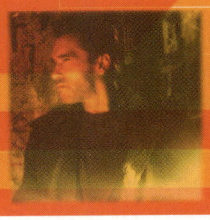


The Donut game, Sampladelic remixes and Pairs: old games rehashed in a retro style, and not very well at that.



the big_picture

MOVIES AND MOVIE SITES ARE BIG BUSINESS. MILLIONS OF PEOPLE LOOK TO THE WEB FOR NEWS, VIEWS AND ONLINE TRAILERS. BUT HOW CAN YOU GET IN THE FRAME? WE SHOW YOU HOW TO GIVE YOUR SITE REAL SCREEN APPEAL



A prime example of how to make your site appeal to movie lovers – the Internet Movie Database with shots from *Gladiator*.

The motion picture industry is worth an estimated $24 billion in America alone. To put this in perspective, each year Hollywood sucks in enough bucks to cover the Gross Domestic Product of Zimbabwe four times over, with enough spare change left over to buy two nuclear submarines and wipe out the Czech Republic. That's some serious buying power.

Our three featured Websites – Internet Movie Database (IMDb), Mr Cranky Rates the Movies, and Popcorn – all focus on the film industry. But why have we chosen these three in particular? First off, they all boast some serious pulling power: the IMDb server snags 14,400 visitors every hour. Second, because each of them presents a different angle on the world of movies.

MODESTY PERSONIFIED

Cardiff-based IMDb was founded ten years ago, and has since become part of the Amazon family. Visually, it looks much like a toned-down replica of its parent company; the colour scheme comprises polite shades of blue and yellow, contributing to an overall look and feel that's, well, unintrusive.

However, what the site lacks in razzmatazz it makes up for with its tidal wave of content. Every link is the start of a fascinating online journey through main streets, side alleys and detours, designed to keep visitors clicking. Founder Col Needham explains: "The site isn't just cross-linked, it's incredibly cross-linked. With the addition of powerful search features, the whole thing comes alive."

Although Col's team numbers more than 20 people, the success of IMDb shows that you don't have to be a *Photoshop* or *Illustrator* whizz to give your site a heavyweight punch. Graphic bells and whistles take second place behind the site's star attraction – its database of more than 200,000 films.

"We've got information on titles from 1892 through to 2003, originating in every country from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe," he enthuses. "We also add more than 700 new titles each week."

UNHOLY TRIO

Mr Cranky Rates the Movies is the creation of three people in the States, all of whom prefer to remain anonymous. What we can say is that one looks after the design, another acts as producer, and the third is Mr Cranky himself – filmgoer, writer and bellyacher extraordinaire. The site is built around his acerbic writing style, with its short and sharp nature reflected in the business-like front-end.

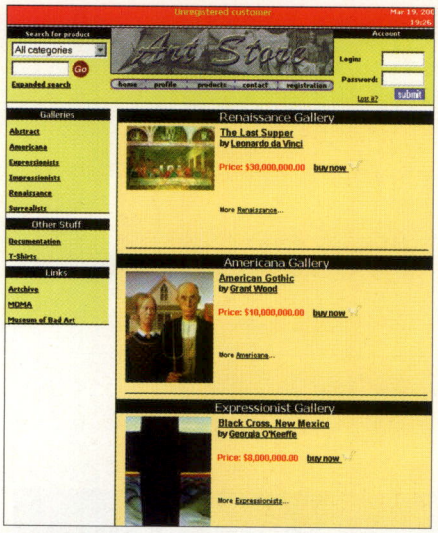
"We combine an original concept with what I'd like to think is some of the funniest writing on the Web," says Mr Cranky. "Frankly, lots of people think they write well, but few actually do. That's one of my biggest complaints about movie reviews and other writing on the Web."

Certainly, anyone who enjoys the sort of caustic humour seen in *One Foot in the Grave*, Jack Dee's stand-up routine and Jeremy Clarkson's spittle-strewn rants, will appreciate Mr Cranky's pungent critique. He's definitely a one-off and consequently he's been syndicated to a number of other sites.

One of those is Popcorn. Although it would be unfair to suggest that either IMDb or Mr Cranky are stylistically bland, they do feel rather subdued alongside Popcorn's explosion of splashy colours, news and interactivity.

"Right from the outset we wanted to be a movie site that felt accessible, fun and informative," says editor Adrian Hennigan. "We're always trying different ways to keep the navigation simple and yet engaging, and with our current redesign we're making it simpler still."

Finding your way around the site is certainly a breeze, with jaunty graphics, icons and buttons persuading viewers to push everything and delve ➤



Minivend is one of the Web's best-kept secrets. Freeware, it provides the functionality of the big commerce sites.

deeper. Not that all users are happy, as Adrian admits. "Although the site's design is distinctive, the stripes are a *bête noire* for some users. We've reacted to their comments in our redesign."

JUST CLICK HERE

"When IMDb started out, we were a group of volunteers managing the service in our spare time on donated hardware," says Col. "Now it's a major international site and much more of a community. It's fully interactive, has better linkage and enables powerful searches."

And if you're considering setting up a movie-related site, you'll need to include the very same whistles and bells if you're to attract traffic, because Web surfers are an increasingly demanding bunch. They'll want access to a huge breadth of cross-referenced data. They'll want to search. Browse. Buy. Now.

The simple fact is that the 'traditional' method of writing HTML won't work. Store all your stuff as individual documents and you'll drown in a sea of files; it'll also be an overwhelmingly awful task to keep everything updated. Imagine you have 500 pages on 500 films, and you want to change your colour scheme – you'd have to do it 500 times. This method of working will also preclude people from searching for answers to questions; for example, which Abbot & Costello flicks were made between 1945 and 1951, or which films don't have a John Williams soundtrack.

Keep your data centrally, though, and you can have the server pull out what it needs and then spin the information on to a template. Believe it or not, a simple database-driven site wouldn't need more than two pages: one to display the search interface, the other to display the results.

Although IMDb was built in-house, with customised Perl doing all the dirty work, that doesn't mean you have to be a code junkie to give your visitors the same sort of experience. Several inexpensive tools enable you to add database connectivity and a search engine to your site. These include Microsoft's Active Server Pages (part of Microsoft's Internet Information Server, shipped with Windows NT), MySQL at www.mysql.com and ColdFusion at www.allaire.com.

KNOW YOUR ONIONS

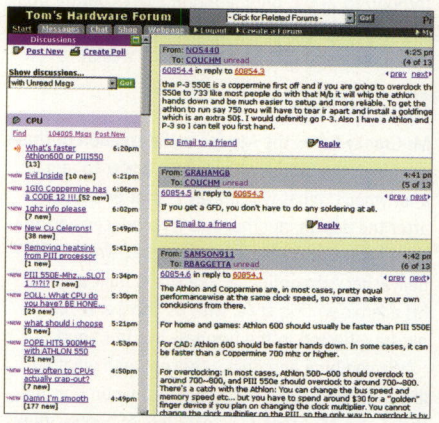
According to Popcorn's Adrian Hennigan, it's the editorial that is responsible for the bulk of the site's costs. "We're the only UK film Website that generates all its own content, and that's pretty demanding," he says.

If you're planning to write your own news and gossip, you'll need to make sure that the information you provide is both fresh and true. It's no good posting stories that are weeks old or full of inaccuracies – unless, that is, you've decided to follow Mr Cranky and branch into humour (read The Onion at www.theonion.com for some timely inspiration).

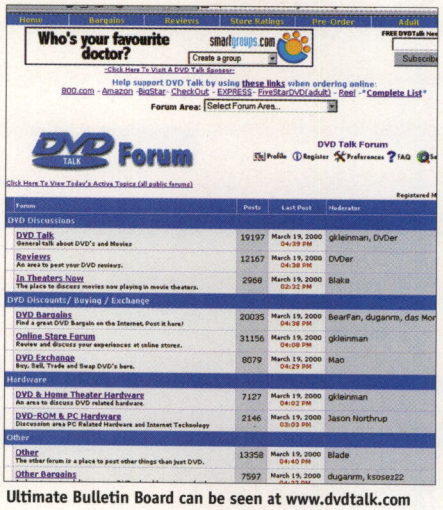
You also need to keep a close eye on as many verified sources as you can – news aggregation services such as NewsNow at www.newsnow.co.uk and Moreover at www.moreover.com do this for you at a stroke – and don't plagiarise. If you must copy other people's work, find a good lawyer first.

In terms of getting something back, IMDb is an Amazon company, and Popcorn still uses banner advertising as its prime source of income. "There's always the possibility of an online shop," explains Popcorn's Adrian.

Is he insane? Use these two words recklessly and you can end up being charged £50,000 by a ponytail in a Porsche. But wait. With a little bit of elbow grease and swotting up, a lone Webmaster can set up a working store complete with virtual stock and an off-the-peg shopping cart system. Download Minivend from www.minivend.com, which is not only freeware but provides all the functionality of the big commerce sites, then contact DNC trade sales at www.dnc.co.uk, providers of official clothing and accessories to the film industry. Then hey presto, a revenue stream.



Delphi Forums is one of many sites offering free customisable discussion rooms.



Ultimate Bulletin Board can be seen at www.dvdtalk.com

HELPING HAND

Adrian goes on to explain that he uses an agency to help him spread the Popcorn word. "With so many film sites fighting for the oxygen of publicity, if you don't employ specialist help, well, forget it."

It's certainly not an option if you're aiming for a high profile. Unless you're an expert in PR, you will definitely need outside assistance. Look in the Corporate Services category at www.yahoo.co.uk and talk to as many people as you can, tell them what you're doing and what you want to achieve. Make sure they check their email – time their response to yours – and that they have existing clients out in cyberspace.

Syndication can also lift your little corner of the Web from obscurity. If you have something original to offer, it immediately becomes a valuable commodity, otherwise known as content. You produce it, and other movie lovers come along and pay you a regular whack to replicate it on their site. In return they get increased traffic and you benefit from increased exposure. It works nicely, and has certainly done wonders for Mr Cranky, who is rapidly becoming a victim of his own success.

LISTEN AND LEARN

"Almost every change on the IMDb site results from comments from visitors," says Col. "It's one of our greatest secrets that we're constantly tuning things based on user feedback. I can't think of a single major addition – the voting system, for example – that wasn't based on user requests."

The only criticism levelled at Popcorn involves the distinctive background stripes and speed of the server. "The main comment we get is that the pages can be slow to download, so we're currently spending a lot of time ensuring that they load quicker."

Mr Cranky, meanwhile, is typically cocksure. "We added a links page, and we've also made some slight changes to the forums. Basically, though, our concept has stood the test of time."

Ah yes, forums. These are message areas where

PULLING POWER

WE ASK THE KEY PEOPLE BEHIND EACH OF THE THREE SITES WHAT THEY BELIEVE MADE THEIR SITE SO POPULAR

Website: Internet Movie Database (IMDb)
URL: www.imdb.com
Designer: Mathias Willerup, IMDb Ltd, design@imdb.com
Monthly visitors: 4.7 million
Age: Ten years
What's it like? Breathtaking size and scope. Many a happy hour can be spent hopping from page to page; there are hundreds of film reviews to look at, readers' comments to peruse and actors' profiles to browse. Because everything is cross-referenced, you can go in looking for a biography of John Malkovich and emerge two hours later having bought the complete set of *Munsters* videos.

Bite **"We feature an incredible range of information, from director down to third assistant deputy caterer, together with reviews, quotes, trivia, posters, box office grosses, goofs, technical information, links to other sites and many other sections."**
Col Needham on IMDb

Website: Mr Cranky Rates the Movies
URL: www.mrcranky.com
Designer: ShadowCulture.com, info@shadowculture.com
Monthly visitors: One million
Age: Two years
What's it like? Sardonic, passionate humour, a sort of Denis Leary meets Victor Lewis-Smith. Written by an American, the venomous reviews are pure joy to British readers who for years have hero-worshipped the likes of Victor Meldrew, Tony Hancock and Old Man Steptoe. If you enjoy scathe and sarcasm, and are bored stiff by Hollywood's more feeble flicks, do yourself a favour and pay Mr Cranky a visit.

Bite **"Have you seen all the film critics on the Web? Nobody wants to read the opinion of just another film critic. We're crude, but we're intellectual. We also allow our readers to interact with Mr Cranky – it's essential to the experience."**
Mr Cranky on himself

Website: Popcorn
URL: www.popcorn.co.uk
Designer: Billy Hasirci, Carlton Communications, billy@popcorn.co.uk
Monthly visitors: Three million
Age: 18 months
What's it like? A fresh feel, energetic design and a UK bias, Popcorn has clearly been designed with the British movie goer rather than the movie lover in mind, with much of the site's content focused on events and gossip rather than profiles and minutiae. To some people this may all seem rather trivial, but we'd argue that the constantly updated news library and voracious reviews easily make up for it.

Bite **"Key to the site's positioning as the biggest movie site in the UK is the reliability of all our information. Users also have the ability to download trailers, vote for their favourite movies, and share their views with everyone else."**
Adrian Hennigan on Popcorn

visitors can post their thoughts and opinions, and all the sites listed here make proper use of them. Movies provoke debate like few other subjects, and discussion boards are a great way of making people feel involved. As well as providing a virtual ratings system, with people posting their various agreements and disagreements, it also helps chalk up return visits (people come back to read replies). To add live feedback and messaging to your site, check out UBB at www.ultimatebb.com or sign up to a service such as Delphi at www.delphi.com

"For a site that has so many visitors each and every month, and with our work appearing in at least two other places, there are just three of us who do all the legwork. We're busy people," says Mr Cranky. The moral of this story is, don't overstretch yourself.

All in all, a site new to the movie scene needs to consider everything mentioned on these pages – from forums, reviews, ratings, search engine and database connectivity, all the way down to the style of writing. Make it faithful and comprehensive, and keep the pot boiling.

We've saved the best advice for last: be different. Never follow the crowd and always do something original – innovation conquers all.

As Adrian at Popcorn says: "Find a niche and work at it. Whether it's Bollywood, independent film, sci-fi or whatever, if you can deliver constantly-changing content that's both informative and entertaining, you'll find an audience." Col at IMDb adds: "Work hard and have fun. Be your site's biggest fan and you won't lose." ■

TEXT: **PHILIP WAND** ILLUSTRATION: **RODDY LLEWELLYN**

VISITOR SNAPSHOTS

Everyone has their own idea of what makes a good movie site. Some like to feel they're hooked up to a vast online encyclopedia, while others simply like to drown in hot gossip. We asked a number of film lovers just what they looked for in a movie site, and which sites they visit on a regular basis

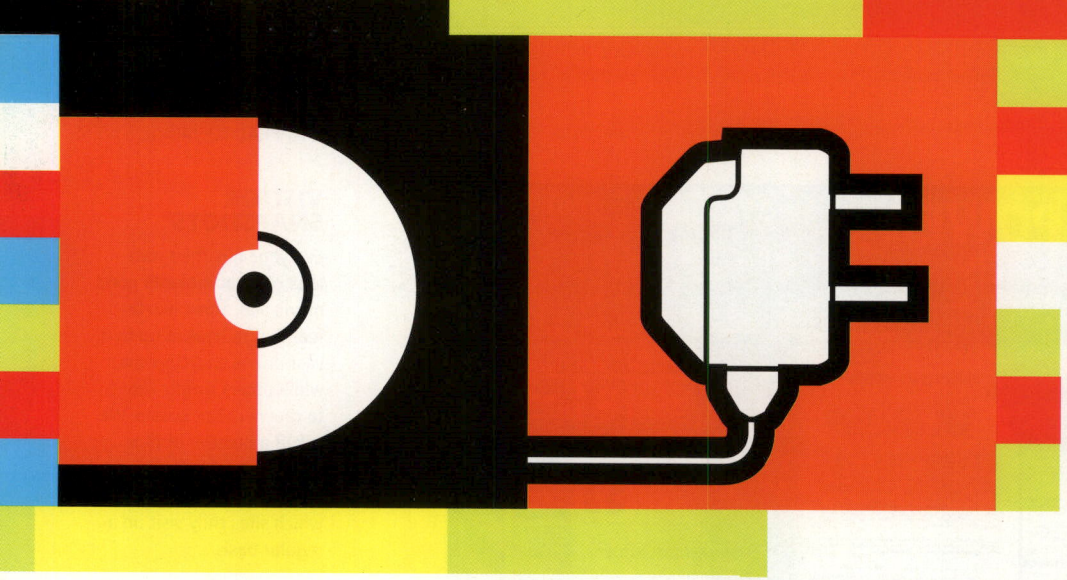
Christian D'Amico
<phalanx@xenon-network.net>
"A great movie site is one that makes me come back again and again because the owner of the site is clearly moved by what he or she is doing. If I can feel their excitement, I'll be sure to pay a return visit."
> **BOOKMARKS** w: **www.film.com**
w: **www.popcorn.co.uk**

Sarah Thomas
<tthomas@cix.compulink.co.uk>
"Something that gives graded reviews from all different sources... It needs to be easily searchable, for title, actor and director, and it also needs an up-to-date news section."
> **BOOKMARKS** w: **www.imdb.com**
w: **www.rottentomatoes.com**

Marc Saunders Hall
<marc@broadercasting.com>
"I enjoy bad films just as much as good ones. The sites I tend to visit reflect that, they're nearly all light-hearted and funny. Writing style is important, far more so than design. Brash graphics remind me of crummy American flicks."
> **BOOKMARKS**
w: **www.mrcranky.com**
w: **www.ohthehumanity.com**

Tony Lamb
<tony.lamb@btinternet.co.uk>
"Online films are the way forward. Made by amateurs, they often explore areas and subjects that Hollywood wouldn't touch with a barge pole, and they can often be excruciatingly funny. They're also available in streaming format, so you can watch them without leaving your seat."
> **Bookmarks** w: **www.ifilm.com**

Andrew Simon
<andrew_simon99@hotmail.com>
"Most of the Web is just a huge maze of duplicate information, with the result that you can catch up on the same news and gossip pretty much anywhere. The sites I like are those with a personal touch, where the people behind it are quite obviously nuts about movies."
> **Bookmarks**
w: **www.aintitcoolnews.com**
w: **www.darkhorizons.com**



●●●●●	Don't miss it
●●●●	Recommended
●●●	Worth a look
●●	Dodgy
●	Don't buy

REVIEWS

You've read about the best sites around; you've heard what the people behind them have to say; and you've seen what the pick of the industry thinks about the future of Web design. But your designer's vision can go nowhere without cutting edge hardware and software to back it up. So now we turn our attention to just that, and ask designers how the latest releases measure up. To kick off, we test the beta of Abode's *Illustrator 9*

illustrator 9

NOW IN ITS NINTH INCARNATION, WE ASKED TWO DESIGNERS TO DO THE HARD WORK FOR US AND ASSESS HOW ADOBE'S VECTOR GRAPHICS GIANT, *ILLUSTRATOR*, SHAPES UP

THE STUDENT DESIGNER

Name: Will Campbell
Occupation: Design student

TOP THREE WEBSITES:

www.download.theforce.net/stardudes.html
"As if the Reduced Shakespeare Company had done *Star Wars* in *Flash*"

www.tomato.co.uk
"Tomato is a ground-breaking agency, even if it has only just moved on to the Web"

www2.bc.edu/~dongd
The personal site of Boston College student Damian Dong, chosen solely for the opening *Flash* animation: 'You can't go wrong if you vote for Dong'

The humble drawing package has come a long way since the crayon. Thanks to programs like Adobe's *Illustrator* you can be sure that your scribbles will be exactly as you want them, and there's the added bonus of not getting wax under your fingernails either. This latest incarnation offers good news for Web designers as artwork can now be saved in vector form when exporting images to the Web. And this is just one of the new features lavished on this illustration package, which is now an industry standard.

But are Adobe's claims for *Illustrator 9* justified? We gave a beta copy to a design student and a professional designer and prompted them for their verdicts. And just like the Eurovision Song Contest, we then invited them to put their scores on the doors...

THE STUDENT DESIGNER

Students are our future, or so we're told, and we should do what we can to foster them and help them grow. And what better way to bring a little light into dim bedsit-land than to grant a student their greatest wish? Not only would it give them a chance to play around with something new, it would also go some way to raising their status in the college bar.

With this in mind, we asked student Will Campbell to devote a couple of hours to Adobe's latest design tool, *Illustrator 9*. Will is in his final year but, unlike most who baulk at their imminent thrust into the real world, he can't wait to get out there.

"I've been doing bits and pieces of design for local companies since I've been at college, and I'm also in the process of setting up my own Website to act as an online CV," he says. "And even though there's currently a shortfall of IT professionals, I think there'll always be competition for jobs at the top agencies, so you do need an aggressive mentality.

"Although I've been doing design for print, what I really want to do is work in Web design. I'm aware that some people dismiss it as not being 'real' design as such, but because you can do so much more on a Website in terms of 3D animation and working with sound, I think that will change. That kind of outlook is just a fear of learning a whole new way of designing, and in that respect I'm lucky to be at college where such resources are available to me. And now I'll get a head start in *Illustrator* too..."

INTO THE WEB

Illustrator 9 sees Adobe continuing its assault on the Internet market, aided in no small part by its integration with other Adobe products, including *Photoshop 5.5* and *GoLive*, as well as Macromedia's *Flash*.

Will kicks off his exploration of *Illustrator* by importing a photo from *Photoshop*, and is immediately impressed by the Web optimisation tools.

"One of the main problems with design software is it can be almost too good for the Internet. You're used to trying to create the best possible image for print or whatever, but it's almost the reverse for a Website, where you want fast download times and don't mind sacrificing a bit of picture quality. You can already

NEW FEATURES
Fully integrated with *Flash* and Adobe products
Full transparency control
Optimisation for the Web, including colours and output options
Release to layers, with thumbnails
Pixel support to accompany pixel preview
Customised keyboard shortcuts
Instantly applicable effects, such as feathering
Live Shapes to automatically resize shapes to accommodate text

set this optimisation in *Photoshop*, and I like the fact that you don't have to mess around with it a second time."

Even better, *Illustrator*'s compatibility with *Photoshop* works both ways, with colours and PSD text that can be exported to *Photoshop* for editing. More crucially, you can preview images to assess how they will look in a browser.

In the meantime, Will has been busy mutating his photo with a series of coloured blobs and stripes. What was originally an innocent-looking spaniel now resembles some kind of ghastly X-rated mutation. Finally though, he's ready to deliver his verdict.

"What I like most about *Illustrator 9* is the fact that so many of the applications are so instant. On the Web everything happens quickly – instant messaging, instant news and the like, and if you spend all day in that environment you tend to get impatient.

"However, I would rate this package: you can feather on-the-fly and create instant shadows and transparencies. You can customise the keyboard shortcuts too, which would be an advantage if you were using *Illustrator* all the time."

GOING LIVE

Importantly, live changes made to your creations in *Illustrator 9* needn't affect the underlying paths and text, so you're free to play around to your heart's content. This means you can maintain the style of a Website and yet still make alterations to its appearance without having to redo each step.

One of the new features is Live Shapes, which enables you to apply shapes such as a rectangle to objects, including text, with the option for the shape to grow or shrink. Whether Will will use it to try out a number of variations on his 'dog of the devil' theme doesn't bear thinking about.

With Live Shapes, changes to a Website's design are quick and easy.

"Something else I enjoyed, especially compared to *Illustrator 8*, is the increase in transparent effects. The scope of different effects is almost unlimited, as you can apply them really quickly to objects, words, layers – anything at all, in fact. I can see how you could get a bit carried away and end up with a really ghostly-looking Website. However, all the layers can be moved to individual layers, which means you can see exactly what you're up to. There are thumbnails for each layer as well.

"You can also export layers as *Flash* frames or as PSDs, and then compress and output them as instant Web formats such as GIFs and JPEGs."

So far, so good, but was there anything Will didn't think was terrific? "My only criticism is that anyone who isn't already familiar with the package could find themselves lost in a whole bunch of effects very quickly indeed." ■

TEXT: **KATHERINE DOGGRELL**

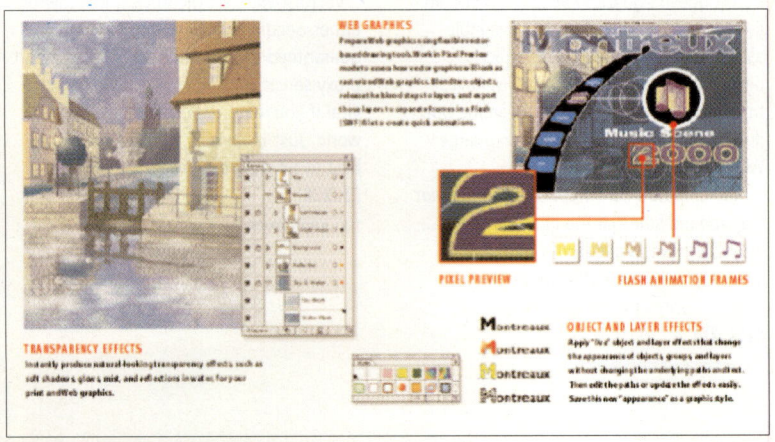
DETAILS

Price: £299 (Upgrade £112)

Contact: www.adobe.co.uk

Platform: PC and Mac

Requirements: Pentium/PowerMac; Win 98+/NT4/OS 8.5+; 64MB RAM; 105MB HD



***Illustrator*'s transparency effects offer endless scope for creativity. Different layers can be edited, and the pixel preview saves a lot of time and guesswork.**

AND HERE'S WHAT A PROFESSIONAL DESIGNER THINKS...

Name: Ben Tomlinson
Company: SAS Design (www.sasdesign.co.uk)
Position: Designer
History: He was there at the beginning of the Web, designing bulletin boards
Latest project: Get Out There (www.getoutthere.bt.com)
Finest project: Get Out There "They trust us to do pretty much what we want"

AS a professional designer, you probably use *Illustrator* everyday. That's the case with Ben, so we asked what he thought of the beta.

"Before anything else, I found it was a bit slow to load, but that could be down to the fact that it's a beta copy.

"The first new feature I noticed was the layers, as you can now look at them and edit them, which is an improvement on *Illustrator 8*. Live Shapes is another interesting feature, and it's particularly useful in Web design as it enables you to alter things like buttons with minimum fuss. Clients are always changing their minds about what they want their site to do and how they want it to look, so this would make my job a whole lot easier."

Ben continues: "Another aspect that's important with Website design is the pixel preview. When you've created something in *Photoshop* you have to look at it and assess whether it's going to look good once it's published. It takes a long time to load it up and check, but this feature enables you to see how it's going to look straight away. You can even look at the individual pixels, although you can't edit them."

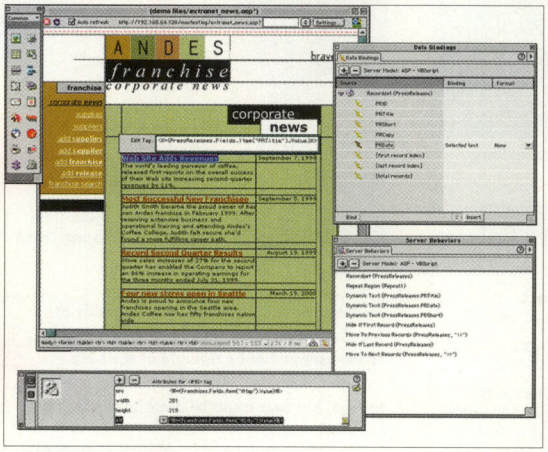
Ben is also pleased about the integration with *Photoshop*. "This is a critical part of the package. You can create things in *Photoshop* and import them easily into *Illustrator* without making any changes – and the same applies when you export something. It also works with *Flash*, which is important. You can create all the frames for a *Flash* animation in *Illustrator 9* and move them over afterwards. It then optimises *Flash*, which is helpful."

Did any other new features impress Ben? "The transparency is a plus – you can't do that in *FreeHand*. It's a definite plus, although I don't know if that alone would be enough to convince people to move away from their existing package. However, together with the layers, I'd say it's the best new feature. What's more, the transparency is instant, so you can work much faster without having to go and change things all the way along.

"The layers would be my favourite part of the package, and the fact that you can import and export into other programs without any problems will definitely appeal to a lot of people. Knowing that you can use *Photoshop* alongside it is also a huge bonus."

web_wizardry

GET THE RIGHT SOFTWARE FOR YOUR JOB, THEN PUSH IT TO THE EDGE USING ALL YOUR ARTISTIC FLAIR AND YOU'VE GOT IT MADE. EVERY ISSUE, WE'LL BE ROUNDING UP THE LATEST AND GREATEST SOFTWARE ON THE MARKET, AND GIVING YOU OUR VERDICT



Dreamweaver UltraDev

Price: £469 (inc VAT) Upgrade from *Drumbeat* £116, from *Dreamweaver* £234. If you bought *Drumbeat* after 5 April this year, it's free
Contact: www.macromedia.co.uk
Platform: PC only
Requirements: Pentium 120MHz/PowerMac; Win 95/NT 4/OS 8.6; 48MB RAM; 30MB HD

SINCE MACROMEDIA'S stock-boosting announcement last October that it was to concentrate on its e-commerce software, the San Franciscan company has unleashed a series of powerful tools on to a rapturous audience. The latest of these, *Dreamweaver UltraDev*, replaces *Drumbeat* as a result of Macromedia's purchase of the Web-to-database connection software from Elemental Software last year.

Macromedia has welcomed *Drumbeat* into its family like the twin *Dreamweaver* lost one careless Saturday in Sainsbury's. The issue now is whether Macromedia will brainwash *Drumbeat* or remember that it once had goals and ideals of its own.

Drumbeat excelled with its back-end features, and made its name as the fastest way to build dynamic database-driven Websites without programming, opening up Web applications for those not fully conversant in clicks and whistles. It may not have stood up to the competition in terms of design, but it was almost entirely responsible for the rapid increase in Web applications over the last year.

A wise move then, and the first thing Macromedia did to *Drumbeat* was to embed it thoroughly in *Dreamweaver*.

The might of Macromedia now means that this new, shinier *Drumbeat* not only works across all platforms, it also connects to any ODBC, JDBC or ADO database, including Oracle, Sybase, Informix, Microsoft SQL Server and MS Access. This is a departure from its predecessor, which was great – provided you only used ODBC.

Compatibility is the watchword with *UltraDev*, as it enables you to build ASP, SP and *ColdFusion* sites in one environment for all the major industry servers.

You can also fully customise *UltraDev* through the keyboard and menus, increasing that all-important feeling of control. Although it's aimed at those with no programming skills apart from an inventive use of tabs, designers can toggle between visual and source editing, while keeping an eye on any unwarranted coding. Critically, Macromedia claims the code is some of the cleanest around.

UltraDev also enables you to view, edit and test live data in the workspace, even with dynamic content – a feature that's rapidly becoming an industry standard.

The only worrying aspect of *UltraDev* is that it doesn't go quite as far as it should. E-commerce features are only available as downloadable extensions, which is peculiar as the package is ideally suited to companies that want to sell online but don't have the money to sustain a large Web department.

Macromedia's consumption of *Drumbeat* may remind some of the early days of Microsoft's slash-and-burn policy, but when the result is as strong as this, it seems churlish to object.

TEXT: **KATHERINE DOGGRELL**

Virtual World browser

Price: *Tourist:* Free. *Citizen:* £9.99 a year
Own personal world: From £62
Own business world: From £213
Contact: www.vectorscape.com
Platform: PC, NT, Mac and Linux
Requirements: 16MB RAM; 100MB HD, 28.8Kbps modem

IF THE THOUGHT of combining a chat forum with a 3D virtual world appeals, then Vectorscape's new *Virtual World* browser certainly warrants a look. You can guide your character through a number of worlds while chatting or texting your online friends, developing your plot of land or indulging in some virtual shopping.

Vectorscape uses *3D Studio MAX* to create the contents in its virtual world, which are generally well defined and smooth. The browser's main attraction, though, is its changing grade of involvement. It's easy to get started, but more complex activities such as creating your own worlds lie just around the corner.

Initially, all you need to do is select an avatar (the character that will act as your virtual body), and away you go. And with 30 characters to choose from, even the most conscientious of users should be able to find a digital double.

Vectorscape isn't mean with its browser either. Secure access for any ISP user is guaranteed thanks to its ability to support proxy servers and firewalls – all the more vital if you're using your own business world. Just remember that it's probably best to let the boss have a go first.

TEXT: **KEITH DREW**

Zoom Server 3.5

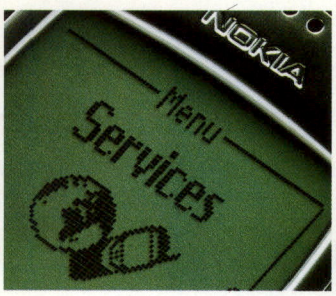
Price: SoHo Edition: £399*; Small Biz £799*; Merchant Edition £3650**; Professional Edition £12,750**; Enterprise Edition £27,250*
** One-off price ** Annual price; maintenance package also available*
Contact: www.mgisoft.com
Platform: PC only
Requirements: NT Server 4/NT 4; 15MB HD; 64MB RAM (128MB rec)

IF YOU WANT visitors to your Website to see the bigger picture, then you need some software that enables them to zoom in on images and move around. *Zoom Server* is ideal for this.

All your visitors need do is move the mouse pointer over an image and click to zoom into the picture. Also, because all the work takes place serverside, there are no plug-ins to download and huge images make the leap to the end-user's computer with ease. Another bonus for designers is that there's a friendly look and feel to *Zoom*-served images.

This is one for the techies and clients with big e-commerce budgets. If the thought of configuring *Zoom Server* on an NT4 Box fills you with dread, perhaps you'd better stick to a simpler solution. But if you've got a client who demands an easy-to-use site that'll show off the finer details of their products, give this consideration.

TEXT: **MICHAEL ROSE**



Nokia WAP Server 1.0

Price: Varies according to number of users and security options taken. Single licence wallet is $1430
Contact: www.nokia.com/corporate/wap/
Platform: PC/Unix
Requirements: Pentium 266MHz; 128MB RAM (256MB rec); 100MB HD; Java Runtime Environment 1.2.2; Java HotSpot 1.0.1

WAP IS THE WORD on everyone's lips at the moment and Nokia has not only brought out a range of slinky-looking WAP phones, it's also released a suite of server tools to help you create content for them.

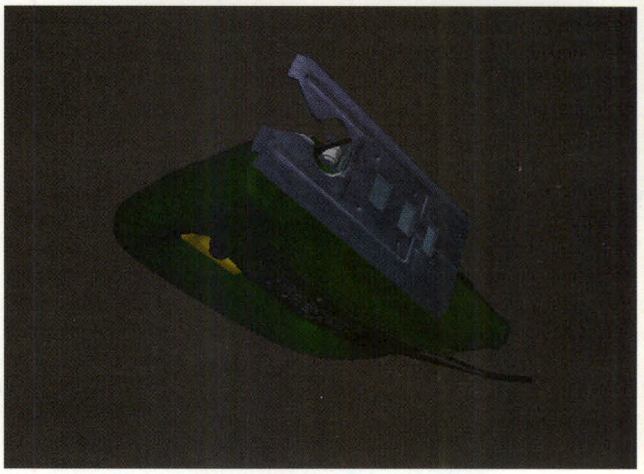
So what's the deal? Well, the WAP server is similar to a Web server, and you're completely in control of the content and how you enable your users access it. In other words, you're not tied to a specific gateway or WAP ISP, which means more flexibility for you and more security for the end-user.

At the heart of all this is Java (you'll need it running on your server), which means you can add a whole host of homemade applications without having to draft in an additional application server.

Also, the beauty of Java is it enables you to write programs that will seamlessly integrate your WAP services with your existing back-end systems. This means that putting a pre-existing Website or catalogue online via WAP is a cinch – providing you're well versed in Java, of course.

Techies and developers should listen up, as the full range of features and possibilities is vast. And with Nokia at the leading edge of WAP technology, it's probably a safe bet in terms of a future-proof WAP solution.

TEXT: **MICHAEL ROSE**



Cult3D 5

Price: Free download
Contact: www.cycore.com
Platform: PC/Mac
Requirements: Netscape 2+/Explorer 4; Windows 95+/NT/Unix/Linux; PowerMac

TOUTED AS THE first application to enable 3D graphics to be inserted into any *MS Office* or *Acrobat* document, *Cult3D* gives you all you need to rotate the train, boat, plane or 3D object of your choice across your site. This is one package that's sure to please clients looking to get their message across to as big an audience as possible. It's certainly a handy tool to have in your armoury.

With clients ranging from Boeing to Nokia, *Cult3D* provides a cheap and effective method of displaying goods over the Net, and there's no need for months of mapping and engineering degrees either.

Where *Cult3D* triumphs, though, is with its small file size. Typically 20-200KB, even slow modems can download graphics quickly. These can also incorporate any sound or music you feel inclined to use.

The fastest 3D rendering engine in the world, *Cult3D* works with all common Web browsers and requires no extra 3D hardware to view, so it's ideal for all e-commerce sites. Plus, this latest release has a host of new features to play with, such as creating smoke, rain, fire and so on. The key is not to overdo it and cause a storm. ■

TEXT: **KATHERINE DOGGRELL**

ON THE CD
You'll find demos of *Virtual World*, *Zoom Server 3.5*, *Cult3D 5* and the Nokia WAP Server.
For more, turn to page 34.

image_conscious

IF YOU WANT TO STAY AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF WEB DESIGN, YOU'RE GOING TO NEED THE BEST HARDWARE YOU CAN GET. HERE, WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE BEST BUNCH AROUND RIGHT NOW

The Internet has been touted as the place where all your virtual dreams can come true, and where the costs of setting up office and retail space are slashed to nothing. However, the key thing that every designer needs is good value and high quality hardware.

That's why, every month we'll be reviewing the most up-to-date and choice bits of kit, bringing you the best and most cost-effective digital imaging hardware around. This month's offerings are...

PhotoPC 850z digital camera

Price: £629
Contact: www.epson.co.uk
PC/MAC compatible: Yes, with USB port, also for iMac
Resolution: Three megapixels
Optical zoom: 3x
Digital zoom: 2x
Special features: Solar-powered LCD screen; Direct to print option; Video output

WHEN DIGITAL CAMERAS first snuck into the market, they were criticised for being bulky, battery-inhaling gadgets, operable only by those with a degree in electronics. But since then prices have plummeted, quality has improved immeasurably, and if you're looking to get images to your Website quickly, it's the way to go.

Epson's latest attempt to sew up the imaging hardware market comes in the form of the PhotoPC 850z. Although it's not the most compact camera in its price range, it has more features than most and easily outstrips its SLR colleagues.

With 8MB of memory (in Compact Flash memory card form), the 850z can hold a maximum of 26 photos. While this is true of most cameras, the Epson manages it without you having to recharge the batteries four times. Lifespan is a big consideration – you don't want to run out out of juice halfway through a shoot. With the Epson, though, you could sneak it out of the office to a wedding, record the happy couple in glorious technicolour and replay their smiling faces into the night. The USB interface means it's compatible with Macs and Windows, and the fast transfer speed also means you can upload the shots to your Website before they embark on their honeymoon.

What else? Well, the main attraction of the 850z is its 3x zoom lens which, combined with the enlargement facility, permits the kind of range the paparazzi give themselves bad backs for. Also, rather like a still camcorder, the 850z has a sound recording facility (which may need a few goes to get the hang of, otherwise you just end up with some disjointed shouting).

The 850z also has a direct-to-print function that you can link up to any Epson stylus printer. And just to make sure that your photos look the very best they can, *PageMill* and *Presto!Mr Photo* come bundled too.

Sharp images, cool features and an affordable price tag mean this comes highly recommended.

XM1 digital camcorder

Price: £1958
Company: www.canon.co.uk
Optical zoom: 20x
Digital zoom: 100x
PC/MAC compatible? Yes (IEEE1394 FireWire to iMac)
Resolution: 320,000 pixels
Special feature: It's the first camcorder to feature a fluorite lens

WITH BROADBAND TECHNOLOGY rapidly approaching our shores from the US, downloading movies from the Internet need no longer entail the day-long nightmare of random beeps and flashes.

Whereas corporate promos used to be time-consuming and expensive affairs, the budding *Blair Witch* fan can now produce near-Hollywood films from their desktops.

iMac's *iMovie* software is so simple to use that, for once, an instruction manual is redundant. If you can master the concept of play and record, then you're there. To create a movie, all you need do is shoot video with a DV camcorder, connect it to the iMac with a plug-and-play FireWire connection, edit the clips and then export the finished product into *QuickTime* and all the world can marvel at your use of light and shade.

The *iMovie* editing package has a facility which enables you to add and modify sound. You can also create your own credits in a variety of styles, so you needn't suffer the fate of the unrecognised artist.

Apple recommends the Canon series of DV camcorders for use with *iMovie*, with the XM1 as the ideal mid-range tool. Its handy flip-out-and-swivel viewing screen is large enough to banish squinting, but more importantly it enables you to view the movie as it would appear on screen.

As with most camcorders, the main flaw is the short battery life, although in this case the machine's death usually coincides with the end of a 30-minute tape.

An important consideration for the mobile director is that the XM1 enables greater control over the recorded images than most idiot-proof camcorders. You can add a variety of digital effects while filming, ranging from black-and-white recording to fading, stretching and strobing. Plus, for those late-night filming moments, the exposure can be adjusted manually; this means that when you're taking advantage of its zooming ability, you won't get lost in the dark recesses of a colleague's nose.

Impression 1600 scanner

Price: £751
Contact: www.epson.co.uk
Resolution: 1600x3200 dpi
PC/MAC compatible? Yes, USB as standard, optional IEEE 1394 for Mac G3/G4
Special feature: Transparency unit with 1600 Pro

ALTHOUGH a digital camera solves many imaging difficulties, the office Bailey can't produce all the photos you need, particularly where products are concerned.

Epson's Expression 1600 flatbed scanner combines high-speed, one-touch scanning with 1600x3200dpi optical resolution, enabling high-quality scans on reflective media (the 1600 Pro also throws in a transparency adaptor for an extra £200).

Importantly, the 1600 comes with a wide range of software, including *Photoshop* and *TextBridge* as standard. Combined with network scanning capabilities, this should bring an end to those unfortunate incidences where sending an image around an office leads to the loss of a nose or the addition of an eye on an image.

Deskjet 1220c

Price: £292
Contact: www.hewlettpackard.com
PC/MAC compatible? Yes, USB interface
Resolution: 2400x1200dpi (on photo paper)
Paper range: Postcards to A3
Special features: HP software sharpens low-resolution Internet images to give better results

EVEN ONCE YOU'VE uploaded those photos from your digital camera, or set a still from your movie as your desktop, you cannot beat a framed photo over the mantelpiece. Until we can all afford to have flatscreens displaying the works of the world's great artists á la Bill Gates, we'll always lust after tangible objects.

Hewlett Packard's Deskjet 1220c enables photo-quality printing from matchbox-cover size to A3, continuing the company's tradition of high-spec, easy-to-use printers. Knobs and whistles are kept to a minimum to prevent confusion, but if you can't make it through the tiny manual, there are a variety of emergency entrances for retrieving stray paper without dousing yourself in rainbow inks.

The 1220c comes with HP exclusive software, which is more of a hindrance than a help, but fortunately this isn't essential to happy and effective printing. Slightly more inconvenient is the lack of a printer interface cable with the package. But for the trees, it prints on both sides.

TEXT: **KATHERINE DOGGRELL**

my_favourite software

EACH ISSUE, A DESIGNER WAXES LYRICAL ABOUT THE SOFTWARE THEY COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT. THIS TIME AROUND, ONLINE EDITOR FROM SLAMON, PETE JONES, PAYS HOMAGE TO MACROMEDIA'S *FLASH*

Pete has been a *Flash* officianado for years: "I was working for a company called Future Internet Technologies a few years ago, and it had a Polish guy called Wiesiek who was a Java genius. He was like a Polish Steven Hawking, always talking about quantum theory at lunchtimes. We used to have massive arguments over Java and *FutureSplash*, because at the time I thought it would be really good for doing navigation. Everyone was using Java to do graphics, but unfortunately Java is still not that good at manipulating graphics – whereas with *FutureSplash* you had streaming graphics. They were really high quality: you could scale things, stuff moved, all of which was new at the time.

"When Macromedia acquired it and did v2, it had sound; then v3 had all sorts of bells and whistles. I like it because I can see there will be two styles of Website. There'll be pure information Websites, which are done with dynamic HTML; and then there will be media Websites, all done with *Flash*. Front-ends, forms, interaction: the whole lot will be done with *Flash* and other embedded objects like *Director* applets.

Pete reckons that *Flash* has now turned into quite a technical tool, too: "It was purely animation before. If you were an artist and you wanted to have something move on a Website, you could draw it and have it animated inside 30 seconds. That's the beauty of it. Now you can still do that, but if you're an audio person, you can use it for purely audio too. If you're a techie you can get into the programming and love the programming elements of it.

"As an overall package there's the fact that if you've come from a purely graphic design background (which I haven't – I'm half techie, half designer), you can be frustrated when you move into Web design. This is because you can do something on paper but you can't translate it to your browser. That's where *Flash* comes in.

"With *Flash*, you can sit down with a piece of paper, draw a design and reproduce it exactly, knowing it's going to look the same in *Explorer*, *Navigator* or wherever."

And even though Pete is not a Mac lover, he concedes that the good thing about *Flash* is that it conquers the font debate: "The problem is that you have issues with fonts. If you have a really funky type style on your PC, it doesn't follow that it's the same on the Mac. Standard fonts you're okay with. But if you design your front end with *Flash*, you don't have any font issues at all. This is because *Flash* downloads the characters and fonts that it needs as part of the movie, so it's the same on a Mac as on a PC.

"Screen resolution is the other factor. People now have monitor resolutions up to 1600-pixels across, but many Websites are still being designed for screen widths that are no more than 640-pixels across. You can design Websites that expand, but the problem is that you have small graphics which you engineer to fill up a reasonable space on a small resolution screen. So, when you expand the site to fill a bigger screen, they become tiny and the viewer can't see what they're looking at.

"The good thing about *Flash* is that you can design a front-end that sits in the browser window and scales according to the resolution. This means it appears proportionally to the screen: all very future proof."

However, Pete's keen to point out that *Flash* isn't just a one-trick pony. "I was doing a CD-ROM project before Christmas, and part of it was an animated sequence that was going to be rendered out as a Windows .avi movie. So the whole thing was authoured in *Flash*, then we did a little after-processing with *Premiere*. The fact is that you can use *Flash* as a single tool to create Web animation, digital video, still bitmaps or just basic layout. You can use it for everything.

"It's getting sophisticated, so it will challenge the techies as well as the designers, so that in theory you can already code an entire Website in it. However, it's not at the state where you should do that. It's not quite there right now."

And Paul has a few things on his wishlist for *Flash 5*. "Being able to preview your sound settings would be good. When you go to export your movie at the moment, you can say: 'I want this to be medium quality sound in MP3 format or whatever, but it would be cool if you could have a test button to check the quality of the sound, then have a slider, similar to the colour effect controls."

Anything else? "Well, it would be handy to be able to apply distortion envelopes to shapes, which you can't do at the moment. It's good to be able to define an envelope, then get it to warp and become another shape – you have to do it manually in *Flash* at the moment.

"If I want to create a rectangular object and need it to become a wavy flag-style object, it would be nice to say: 'This is my first shape, this is my second shape, make my first shape fit inside my second shape', especially if you could then morph the second shape and keep the first shape. Then you could take a rectangular box with some text in it and create a flag effect, and you wouldn't have to bother distorting the text manually."

Finally, any favourite *Flash*-aided sites? "I think the interface for the new VW Beetle Turbonium site is impressive. I also love the humour at the Joe Cartoon site, and think the interactive games, toys and stories site Globz is great fun. There's also the site of German film producer Peter Hielscher – there's tons of work done here, and it's really quite different." ■

w: **www.macromedia.co.uk**
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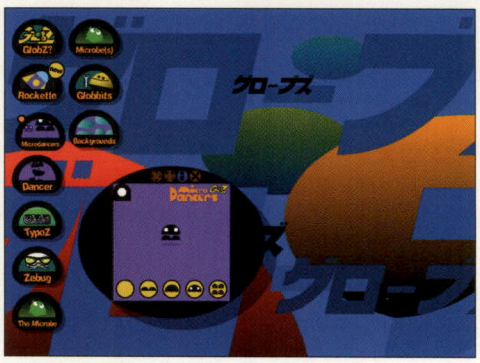

www.Globz.com: "Good fun and great use of *Flash*."

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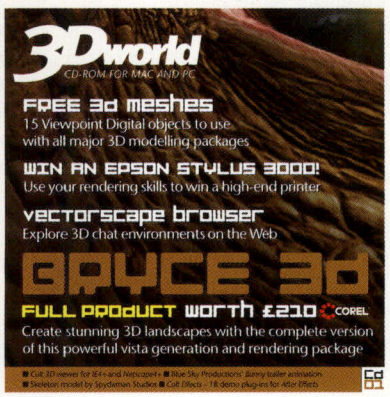
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the web of_change

WEB DESIGN AND MACROMEDIA WERE MADE FOR EACH OTHER. A MUTUAL PARTNERSHIP WHO FELT CUPID'S ARROW THE MOMENT THEY MET, THEIR RELATIONSHIP HAS CHANGED AND GROWN TOGETHER, CREATING THE HARMONY THAT EXISTS TODAY. HERE, MACROMEDIA REVEALS THE SECRET OF ITS FLOURISHING PARTNERSHIP

According to the I Ching, an ancient Chinese book of wisdom, change is the evolutionary constant. Due to the rapid evolution of Web functionality, many Websites that were designed with early tools and solutions look lame and inadequate in today's creative and competitive landscape. Ideologically, there is a growing belief that at the core of the Web is content. But this content must be managed, manipulated, and made to work with processes that are still evolving and have yet to be clearly defined.

At the same time, Web designers must constantly wrestle with issues like the quality and functionality of interfaces, the use of media and the evolution of delivery platforms. As the world of cyberspace becomes more and more pervasive, and more and more people become dependent on its technology, expectations will rise and designers need to acquire both the tools and skills to deliver what the user expects.

RUNNING THE RACE

For designers in particular, this frenzied race and media hype poses an on-going dilemma. In particular, which content to show which users and when, and under what conditions. This will become an even more pressing issue with the advent of new delivery platforms such as Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) and Web TV, for both developers and users alike.

For many Web designers, things like personalisation, analysis, and content management are only considered, if at all, after the site has been built. These are also often seen as added extras instead of integral to the site's organic whole. All too often, content management ended up as home-grown and inadequate because available software solutions were not designed to handle, generate or repurpose dynamic content. In the recent past, typical content management solutions usually amounted to little more than source and document control.

MAKING THE LEAP

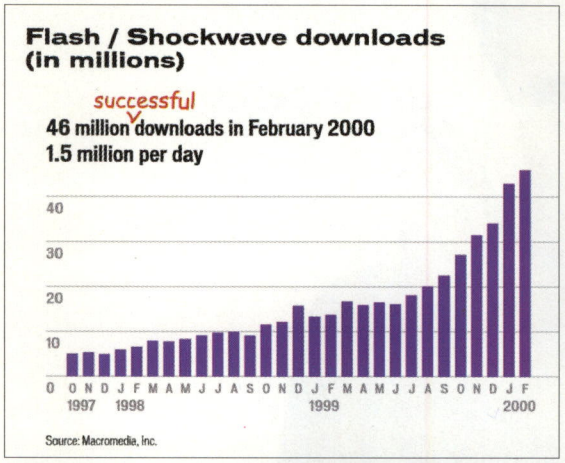
Creating content in a way that enables it to be leveraged in unforeseeable ways is the only way to really protect the value of that content. So, it becomes incumbent on authoring solutions and tools to package content for reuse and extensibility. Content needs to be 'smart' – designed for change, adaptability, and also manipulation. From a designer's point of view this means facilities like flexible interaction with your code, the ability to create templates and libraries plus

extensibility to address new requirements and platforms such as WAP and Web TV. Websites designed to look good for today's Internet will need a radical rethink and redesign to be viable when displayed on small-screen WAP phones or wide-screen Web TV. Faced with such inevitable change, flexible and extensible authoring tools like Macromedia's Web essentials are not just desirable. They're indispensable.

The authoring tool most widely used by Web developers and designers today is Macromedia's *Dreamweaver*. Some 75 per cent of all professional Web developers use *Dreamweaver*, and 75 per cent of all professional Web developers use one or more of Macromedia's solutions. And the reason is pretty simple. Macromedia *Dreamweaver* creates open, extensible Website content that integrates easily with a myriad other Web applications.

"XML, XHTML, WML, DHTML, HTML, *Flash* and *Shockwave* are just a few of the possible languages necessary for today's Web authoring," says Macromedia's Matt Mansell. "That's before you even step into the realms of how each one will work with the different protocols such as HTTP, WAP and HTTPS, to name just a few. Delivery and design is no longer just about static page creation – it's about designing an infrastructure flexible enough to cater for any output technology or design."

Perhaps the most well-distributed software to be found anywhere are the Macromedia *Flash* and *Shockwave* players that run Macromedia *Flash* and *Shockwave* content. With *Flash* available on 90 per cent of all end-user systems, and *Shockwave* available on 52 per cent (128 million users), the vast majority of all high production value content is rendered by Macromedia products. What this means for new Website development is that designers and organisations can use widely available and proven Macromedia solutions to rapidly create state-of-the-art sites.



This shows the huge increase in *Flash/Shockwave* downloads over recent years. It shows March's figures and emphasises 1.5 million downloads a day from mm.com before you even consider OEM shipments with Windows/Mac OS/Web TV/Browsers and so on.

DREAM ON

Using the fundamentally extensible nature of *Dreamweaver*-created applications, you can develop sites that plug in naturally to enterprise solutions such as Macromedia ARIA for analysis and Macromedia LikeMinds for realtime personalisation – or that can plug directly into a variety of content-serving platforms, such as BroadVision or Vignette.

Dreamweaver 3 is the only Web development program that is totally open and extensible. The entire *Dreamweaver* application, including the menu systems, can be customised using JavaScript and XML. If you understand these technologies, you can begin customising and extending *Dreamweaver* right away. On our own Website (www.macromedia.com) the Macromedia Exchange for *Dreamweaver* is the place to get easy-to-install extensions, learn how to get the most out of them and even create your own. Each extension has its own page which includes the extension, a description, user reviews plus a discussion group where you can post questions and get support for an extension.

A BIT FLASH

Macromedia *Flash*, as another example, provides designers with an ideal tool for addressing the complex bandwidth issue. *Flash* has become a pervasive standard technology for adding animation and other dynamic elements to Websites. It enables you to create a Web experience that's more attractive, more compelling and more compatible with a greater number of browsers than any other Web solution. For designers, even dynamic HTML (DHTML), Java and other advanced Web design formats are not reliable alternatives, since they're either not compatible or are inconsistent with different browsers.

With *Flash Player's* pervasive penetration, wide availability, scalable vectors, animation, sound and more, *Flash* sites provide the high production quality that attracts visitors, and brings them back to your site. Plus, because *Flash* is free of the limiting design capabilities of more traditional Web display options, it enables you to create dynamic content that can clearly and exactly express brand and corporate identity.

Currently, 90 per cent of Web browsers already have *Flash Player* installed, and more than 222 million

HOW TO WASTE BANDWIDTH

One of the most effective ways of misusing bandwidth is to bloat graphics: this is key to wasting bandwidth. Here are a few ways you can achieve this...

Put static into the picture – the extra 'colours' will add to the size of the image. Breaking up solid portions of colour is also a good way of adding size. If you can't add static, use lots of drop shadows (of different colours). Take a large image and display it as a smaller one, by altering the width and height tags. Render an image at a higher dpi than necessary.

Another useful way of wasting bandwidth that's often overlooked is to inflate the HTML of the page. Text can also eat up bandwidth or you can use undefined meta tags. Try hiding large portions of text within the HTML document. Be very verbose, and describe things to the smallest detail. This will add to the overall bulk of your document. Use counters so that only you will get a kick out of how much bandwidth you're wasting. Have banners on your page. Everyone loves banners. Also, don't use *Flash* or *Shockwave*. They make your site animation far too fast, smooth, sophisticated and elegant. You might get people coming back again and again.

"MACROMEDIA OFFERS AN EXTENSIBLE SITE PHILOSOPHY AND ARCHITECTURE THAT ENCOMPASSES CONTENT CREATION INTEGRATED WITH CONTENT MANAGEMENT, HIGH-END ANALYSIS AND REAL-TIME PERSONALISATION TOO"

Transformer

Marcus de Ferranti saw the Internet boom coming. He knew that many businesses would have an insatiable need for Web speed and access. Today, thousands of corporate buyers and sellers flock to his Band-X site. Some of the biggest names in the telecom industry—Deutsche Telekom, BT and AT&T—have all jumped aboard. Marcus is what we call a Transformer. Transformers challenge old ways. Drive change in companies. Re-invent careers. And enhance lifestyles.

Marcus reads *Business 2.0*, the magazine for and about Transformers driving the New Economy.

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people can view *Flash* immediately. These days, *Flash Player* is pre-installed on most computers, since it's included with all copies of Windows, Netscape *Navigator*, America Online and Macintosh operating systems, among others. *Flash* is also an ideal tool for addressing design and interface issues with emerging technologies and Web-enabled devices such as Web TV and WAP.

WORKING TOGETHER

And then to *Generator*. Because most Websites are now designed and maintained by a number of different groups and individuals working on different aspects of the project, a tool like Macromedia's *Generator* really comes into its own. By separating design and content, *Generator* acts as a sort of 'mail-merge' for Web elements, and provides a tool and server solution for automating and personalising site graphics. By separating design and content, frequently updated graphics no longer require time-intensive tweaking and updating, which means Web designers can avoid most of the redundant work of ensuring their sites are consistent and up-to-date. This enables you to spend more time on things like developing the front end for sophisticated server-side applications without any real programming knowledge.

As a prime integrator, *Generator* builds headlines, ad banners, maps, calendars, charts and other live and frequently updated data. What's more, it creates them on demand, or will automatically update them at preset intervals.

A brand new addition to Macromedia's Web toolbox is *Dreamweaver UltraDev*, which supports three industry-standard, server-side languages (JSP, ASP and CFML) from within the same design environment. *Dreamweaver UltraDev* provides designers with everything they need to visually build and deploy dynamic database-driven e-commerce applications at a fraction of the typical development time and expense. Drag-and-drop interfaces and live-data previews enable you to quickly build Websites that access and update data in real-time and work across all the major browsers – all without using manual coding.

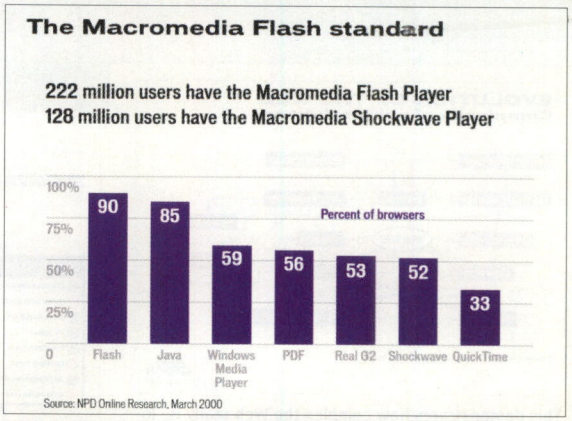
Only *Dreamweaver UltraDev* guides you through the steps of Web-enabling new and existing applications and enterprise databases, including Access, SQL Server, Oracle and Sybase. *Dreamweaver UltraDev* also enables you to take advantage of the Roundtrip HTML, Roundtrip XML and Roundtrip Server Markup between visual and source editing for total control over source code, as found in *Dreamweaver 3.0*.

ESSENTIAL CODE

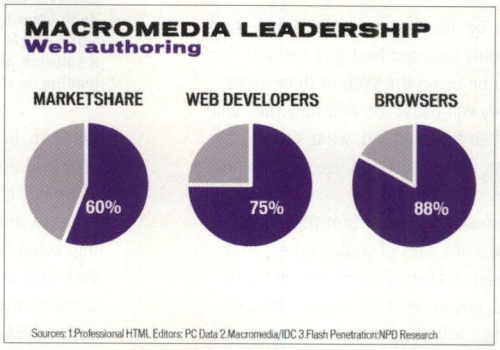
Without a doubt, content and the ability to extend and easily repurpose that content is fundamental to Macromedia's vision of what a Website is all about. Before attempting a Website at home, organisations need to envision all their site's assets as content – from product description to application logic, from JPEG to customer history. And content must be viewed as the nexus around which a site revolves. From there, any organisation can begin to understand that it can create content which is empowered. This means useful content that can be reused and displayed on a variety of devices, at specific times or under specific conditions, and which will mature and increase in value over time.

Macromedia solutions provide Web developers with an uncanny ability to code content with tags for personalisation, analysis, display parameters and content management. With these solutions, business managers are able to optimise the function of specific content, personalise it, analyse it, update it... All at will, on-the-fly and in realtime. As new processes are created and new devices and platforms are developed, this same content can accept further tags, enabling new use.

For designers, this means that you can develop site versions from single content that function equally well on a PC, a tiny WAP phone screen or in sprawling Web TV format. Content objects can easily connect to other open technologies and are not irretrievably bound to any particular product. In fact, Macromedia's tools ensure that these objects guard their own value by remaining independent of specific solutions. And putting such hooks on to the content itself obviates the need for massive integration initiatives as new technologies unfold. Thus, content authoring becomes one of the easiest ways of protecting your investment.



This provides the latest independent research on how ubiquitous *Flash* really is. It compares it against other Web technologies and clearly demonstrates it as one of the largest playback technologies on the Internet. (Source:NPD Online Research, March 2000.)

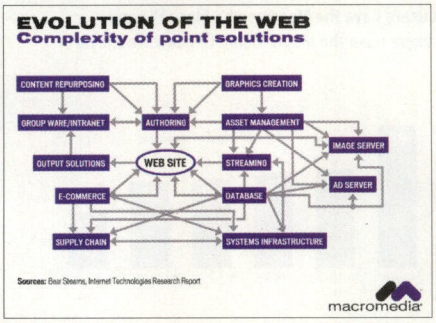


Macromedia is the largest professional HTML authoring tool, largest provider of tools to Web developers, and one of the largest Internet playback technologies with *Flash*. (Source: Pro HTML Editors; IDC; Flash Penetration NPD Research).

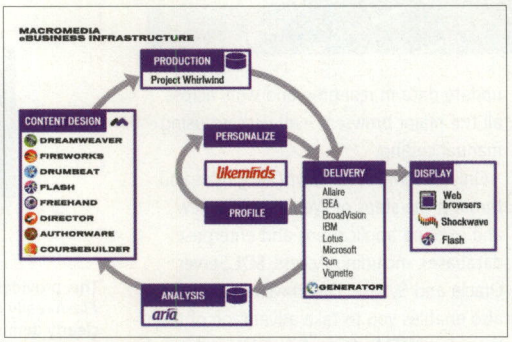
CRYSTAL BALL

Predicting the future is always a mug's game, but it's fair to say that we know more about the Web today than we knew three years ago. On top of that, we also know more about the people using the Web today than we did three years ago. But despite the hype and speculation, we don't really know much about what the

For the month of March 2000, Macromedia had 51,761,682 downloads, which is 1,669,731 per day. That is a 10 million increase from the previous month. IDC Research estimates the total number of users online to be 248 million. Since *Flash* users represent 89.9 per cent, then 222 million users have the *Flash Player* already installed.



This demonstrates how complex the Web really is. To plan and deploy an Internet infrastructure for today, organisations need to analyse, assess and work towards an integrated solution in each and every area this diagram demonstrates.



Macromedia understands and is implementing a range of tools for the complete 'full-circle' life cycle, from your code to deployment, to delivery/personalisation through to analysis. Not a single other software manufacturer can claim to offer a solution and/or understanding as complete and market-leading as this.

Web will be like three years from now. And we can only take our best guess about who will be using the Web in three years, what they will use it for, and how they will use it. With that in mind, what should designers, developers and users expect for Websites of tomorrow?

Well, above all, expect that they won't look much like sites of today. Expect that you'll need to keep some things and add new bits. But most of all, expect change. Site design will need to become more flexible, extensible and reusable, so sites will have to change. This is fundamental. What that change will cost depends a great deal on decisions made today, so designers, developers and clients must engineer for change. Not change next year or the year after that, but change that can happen either next week or the week after.

If content and usability are at the core of the Web, strategic content draws users to a site and keeps them coming back for more. Interface design and navigation determine ease of use and whether or not a site will work on a particular delivery platform. But, like most things, no-one gets it right the first time and no-one gets it right once and for all.

Organic change is a natural process for a well-designed Website, and forward-looking organisations are constantly improving them. Considering the dynamic nature of the Web and its continued evolution toward richer, more complex sites across an ever widening spectrum of devices such as WAP and Web TV, it's fairly obvious that content must be created with the capacity to evolve.

"DELIVERY AND DESIGN IS NO LONGER JUST ABOUT STATIC PAGE CREATION – IT'S ABOUT DESIGNING AN INFRASTRUCTURE FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO CATER FOR ANY OUTPUT TECHNOLOGY OR DESIGN"

MATT MANSELL, MACROMEDIA

ALL ENCOMPASSING

To design content strategically as well as creatively, organisations and designers must understand that the use of content will change over time, and that they must therefore choose a content design solution that will facilitate the inevitable changes required during the life of the content.

Macromedia understands this concept and presents a powerful paradigm for the full content life cycle. And that's why the penetration of Macromedia's multimedia tools is currently unrivalled. Because it provides critical design capabilities as well as scalable, realtime analytical and personalisation solutions, Macromedia is well positioned to provide the tools that will create and influence the way the next generation of Web development progresses. As the I Ching reminds us, the creative and the receptive are the real secret of change. And in the world of Web design, in all of its incarnations, being receptive and creative is what it's all about. ■

• Next month, Macromedia waxes lyrical about how to use its products to create great ads. Be back here for issue 2, on sale Tuesday 18 July.

Case study: Kellogg's

When the Subnet team talk about the Websites the company has built since setting up in 1995, you'll find its enthusiasm infectious. Lancashire-based Subnet has been able to actualise its dreams by becoming a top award-winning UK Web company which can now boast clients such as Disney, Coca-Cola, Golden Wonder and Fox Kids, to name but a few. If a site is innovative, functional, entertaining and talks directly to a client's core market, it must have been created by Subnet.

Kellogg's UK engaged Subnet to revamp its corporate site which needed new positioning, design, navigation and interactivity. The development team, managed by Threesilverfish, changed the strategy of the site to focus on the user's experience and expectations, and to deliver the content to mums and kids in a colourful and entertaining way.

The site aims to provide a fun environment for both young and old. It features a variety of brand-inspired games created in-house at Subnet in addition to the expected product information. The cool games on the new site range from arcade-style reflex testers, such as *Calcium Capers*, to puzzling brain-rackers like *Tony's Word Search*.

Macromedia was a logical choice for interactive development technologies including *Dreamweaver*, *Flash*, *Shockwave* and *Generator* which, as a suite of tools, enabled the team to be efficient and creative on behalf of the client. Changes and improvements using templates and library Items were straightforward using *Dreamweaver's* site management capabilities. Through the tight integration of *Dreamweaver 3* and *Fireworks 3*, Subnet used custom-written command scripts to create graphical furniture for the site, saving on development time.

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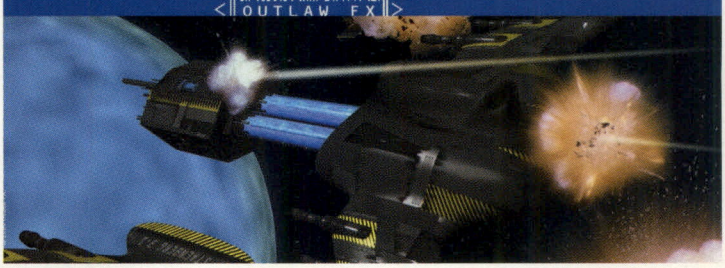

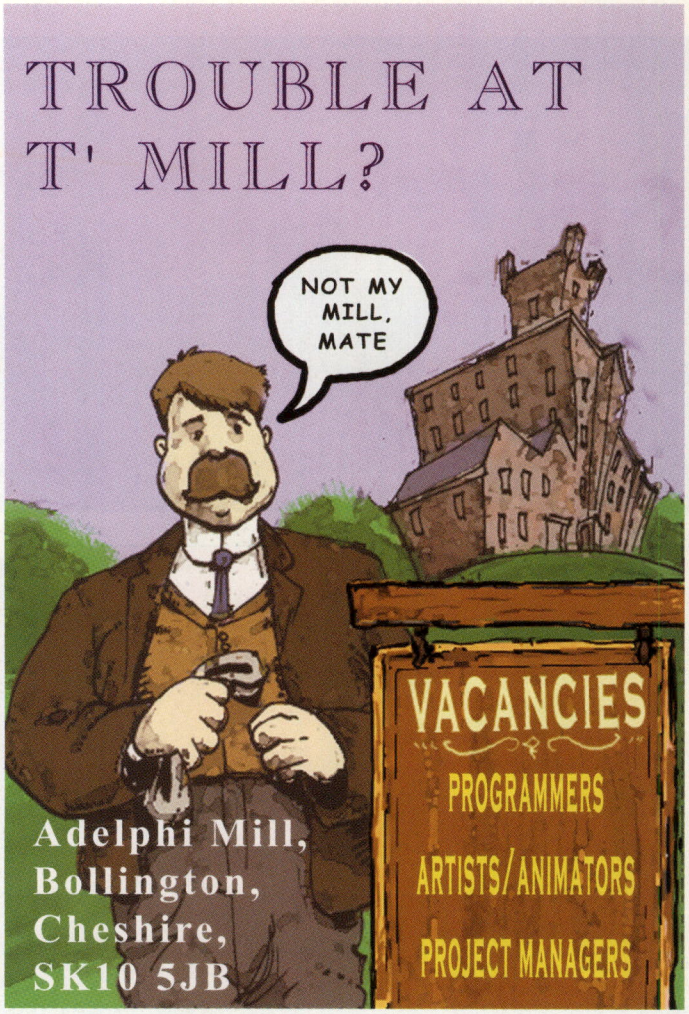

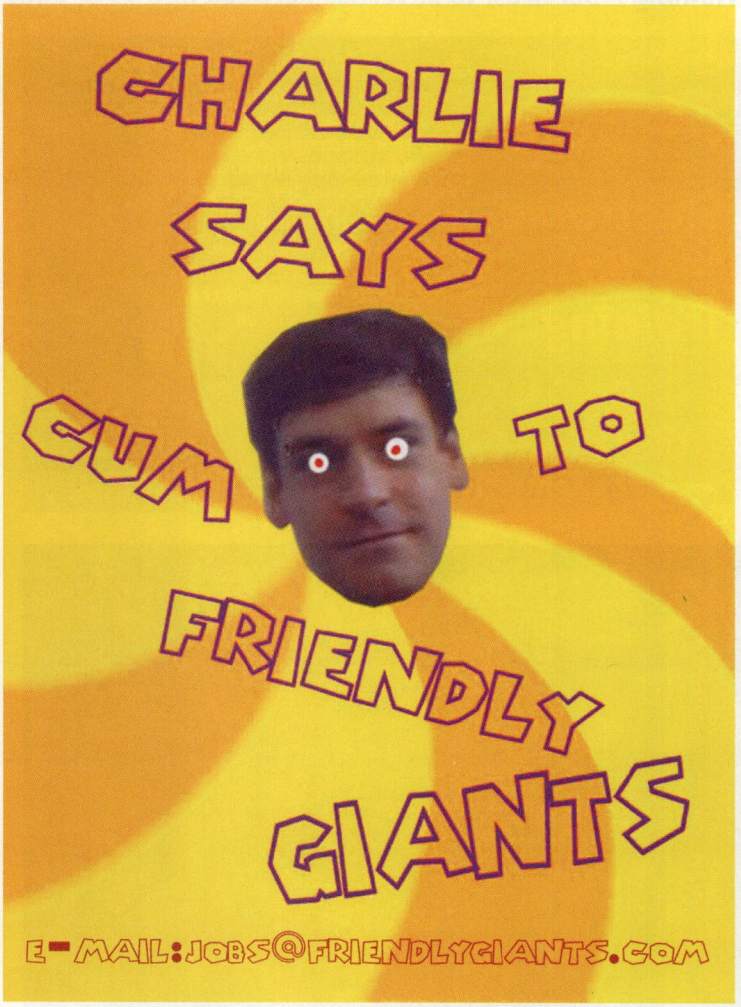

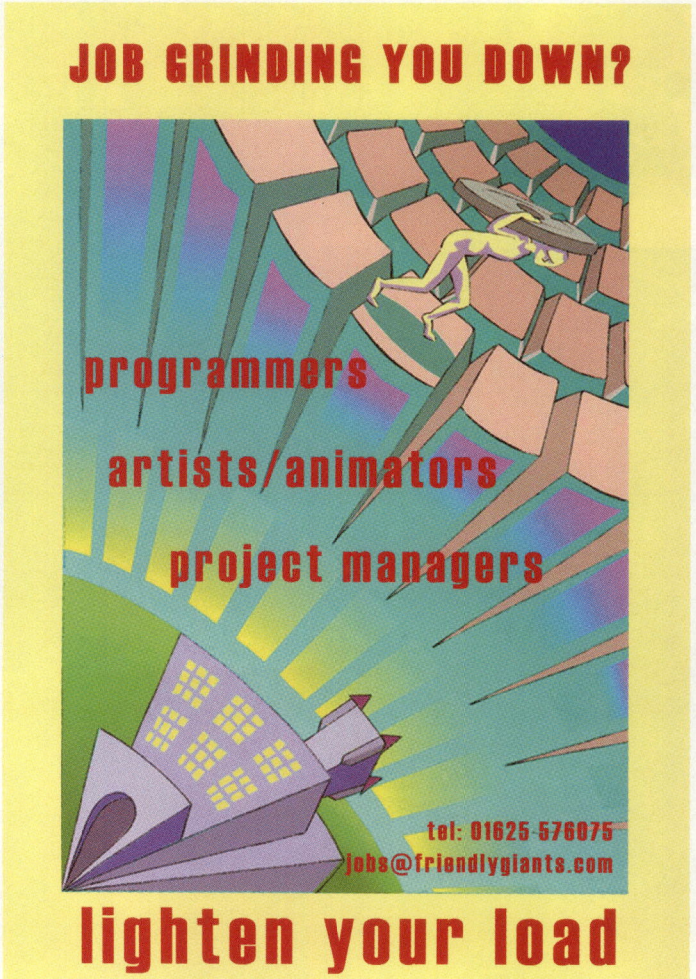

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FREE YOUR MIND

...AND YOUR CAREER WILL SURELY FOLLOW

Working in a Web design studio beats the hell out of a lot of other jobs. But if you find yourself looking for a new opportunity, you'll need to be prepared.

Victoria Lubbock, managing director of recruitment consultancy Recruit Media Ltd, specialists in placing contract and permanent creative and information-based clients, has interviewed more than 3000 people in her 11-year career. So who better to approach for some expert advice?

PUT TOGETHER AN ACTION PLAN

"Most people make the fundamental mistake of working through their career a single step at a time," says Victoria. "Figure out the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving your aspirations. If it's simply a lack of relevant experience, target and identify companies that will serve as a transitional means to an end."

RESEARCH POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

"For most people, the culture and personality of an organisation is as important as the role itself," Victoria points out. Find out as much information as you can, using the Website, business press and annual reports. If you're going through an agency, ask your contact to give you a full brief of the prospective company.

WRITE A SUCCINCT CV

Show the interviewer how your CV demonstrates your control over your career path, and how your personality will fit into the work environment. And be succinct. "A career objective paragraph at the start of a CV can be helpful for an employer or recruitment consultancy trying to evaluate your skills and a possible culture fit."

DON'T STOP TRAINING

"Take responsibility for your own learning," Victoria advises. "Maintain your competitive edge by keeping up to date with technology and the industry in general."

BE A CONFIDENT NEGOTIATOR

A good agency can advise the salary you should ask for, based on your skills and experience. Also, make sure your portfolio contains live examples of work, and that it reflects your professional creative skills.

"You should be able to talk intelligently and passionately not just about the end result, but also the process by which it was achieved and the challenges involved," says Victoria.

recruit_the time is now

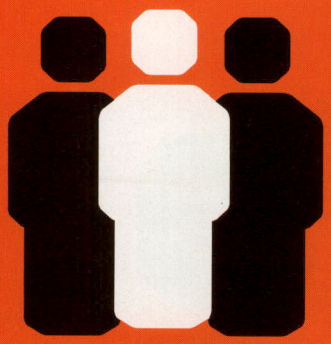
There's no such thing as a job for life any more. In fact, the job market in new media is at present so fluid, Web design agencies are running scared that their best and brightest might desert them in their hours of need. The upshot of this is that although the so-called Information Age has often been compared to the Industrial Revolution, this time round it's labour that has the upper hand in employment.

In today's climate, the demand for good Web designers is high and, if you fit that description, the world is your oyster. There are plenty of vacancies out there, and you'll probably be able to wrangle a good package out of anyone lucky enough to secure your services as well.

However, the skills shortage is not indefinite, and new technology develops at such a pace that the skills you've perfected over a period of months can be rendered obsolete at the drop of a hat.

In light of this, we've put together a recruitment section to help you. Not only do we offer you access to the best recruitment agencies, we also have some great advice to make that job hunt more successful. So if you're on the market or are about to enter the world of new media job hunting, look no further.

• LOOKING FOR A JOB? SUBSCRIBE TO OUR WEEKLY EMAIL *JOBS BULLETIN* AT W: **WWW.CREATEONLINE.CO.UK**



A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF...

what is a web producer?

...BEN STRAWFON, WHO TELLS US WHAT HE DOES ALL DAY

EVERY MONTH, WE PROFILE A DIFFERENT DESIGN JOB TO OFFER THE INSIDE TRACK ON WHAT YOU HAVE TO AIM FOR

Name:	Ben Strawfon
Age:	24
Job title:	Web producer (project manager)
Employer Website:	Good Technology (www.goodtech.co.uk)
History:	A potential PhD student, he freelanced as a developer at Good Technology in 1998 and enjoyed the job (& cash) so much he decided to stay
Latest projects:	iCrunch Music, PetProtect, another Audi site ("can't comment"), David Lloyd Leisure
Finest project	The original Audi site (www.audi.co.uk)

MONDAY
"Monday's are usually quiet. I have a client meeting in the afternoon with a company that's within walking distance of the office. A lot of production work starts on a Monday, so most of the day will be spent briefing people on new jobs, and making sure they have everything they need to get started."

TUESDAY
"By contrast, Tuesday can be very busy. In the morning, there's usually an internal meeting for my department, followed by an internal meeting with Audi. The afternoon then consists of a long meeting with Audi, which can go on until after six o'clock."

WEDNESDAY
"There's another meeting with Monday's client, although this time the focus is on technical issues. It's usually short, so it leaves me the rest of the day to catch up on specifications, meeting notes and so on."

THURSDAY/FRIDAY
"There are no regular meetings scheduled, so these days are pretty free, although there's bound to be at least two or three internal or client meetings. Other than that it's more writing specifications and notes, planning projects or chasing up suppliers. If there's a job finishing on Friday, I may need to help out a bit. Because I have a technical background I can usually lend a hand in some way to ensure the job gets finished."

"THE HARDEST TIMES ARE WHEN THE ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT CHANGES THE SITE'S SPECIFICATIONS. THEY TELL THEIR CLIENT, 'IT WOULD BE NICE TO ADD THAT...' WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT THE IMPACT IT HAS ON THE SCHEDULE AND RESOURCES"

BEN STRAWFON

Debt. Hunger. Crap housing. Such is student life, so when Ben Strawfon left university with a degree in computer sciences and dreams of landing a PhD, he quickly discovered the taste of money by landing a temp job at Good Technology.

After sampling the world of employment and cash, Ben turned his back on the world of academia and watered-down beer to commit himself full time to the company. Starting out as a developer, he soon became interested in Web producing. The first site he worked on, Audi, back in 1998, offered him the chance to indulge in the basics of Web producing straight away.

As Ben recalls: "Although I was taken on as a developer, I started putting the site together as well. Whereas now we have professional site builders, at the time it was getting the material out of everyone and then working to put it all together. I basically ended up coding and project managing."

Since his baptism by fire, he's now a full-blown Web producer who spends his days indulging in a variety of tasks. As well as chasing external suppliers, his day is usually taken up with multiple meetings and writing out reams and reams of specifications.

"You can't really stand over people telling them what to do all the time," explains Ben. "And if you sit down with them, they still go away and forget what you've said; either that, or they complain that you didn't explain something properly! Even though I'd love to just explain things to people verbally, the only way you can really get it across is by giving them a document and then going over it with them."

Then, of course, there's the issue of turning a client's cyberfantasy into Web-based reality. There have been occasions when Ben and his colleagues have had to drop features but, as he points out, "Generally, with computing, anything can be done if you're willing to pay the money."

But that's not to say his job isn't without those moments when he curses the E-Gods. "The hardest times are when account management change the site's specifications," says Ben. "They tell the client, 'It would be nice to add that...', without thinking about the impact it will have on the schedule and resources."

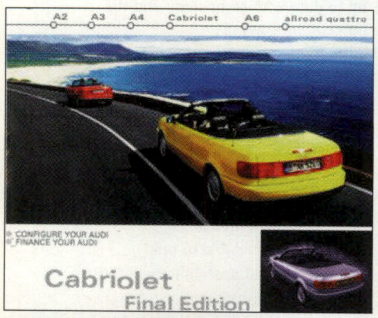
Indeed, with the new Audi site, account management submitted an idea that on the surface seemed like a minor feature but will probably end up costing the car company around five grand. The feature in question enables you to locate your nearest dealer by town, but for this to happen you need Royal Mail postcode databases, which are licensed at a large cost. Plus, a search based on a town requires extra third-party software. "The person put forward the idea because they thought it was a small change, but the end cost is quite high," explains Ben.

As is the norm with any responsibility-laden role, there have been moments when Ben has flirted with disaster. "There have been a couple of occasions when I've got to the end of the project and realised there's a pretty significant component that I hadn't thought about yet. If it happens to a developer, you can put the extra hours in so it's okay. But if it happens to the producer, you have to get other people to put in the extra hours and that's a bit more difficult.

"Fortunately, I've always managed to find a way round it. Sometimes you can go back to the client and try to persuade them otherwise without revealing the reason why. It's like you have to say, 'Let's try and unsell a feature'!" ■

W: **WWW.AUDI.CO.UK**

TEXT: **ADAM PHILLIPS** / PHOTOGRAPHY: **JAMIE BEEDEN**



The Audi site is one that Ben is particularly proud of: grab your dream car online here.

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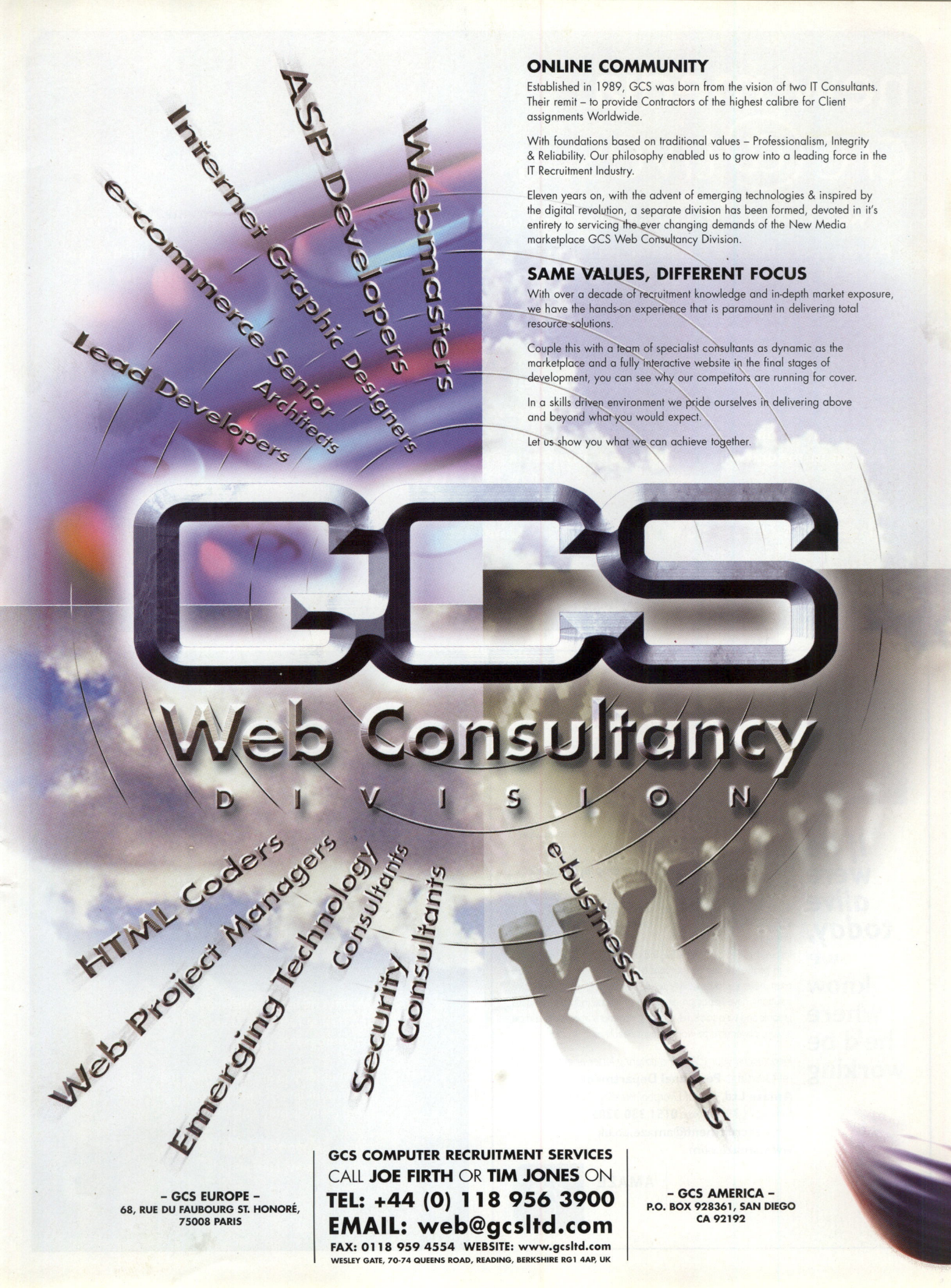

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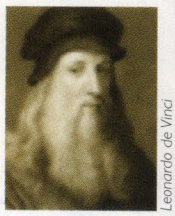

Leonardo de Vinci

If he were alive today, we know where he'd be working

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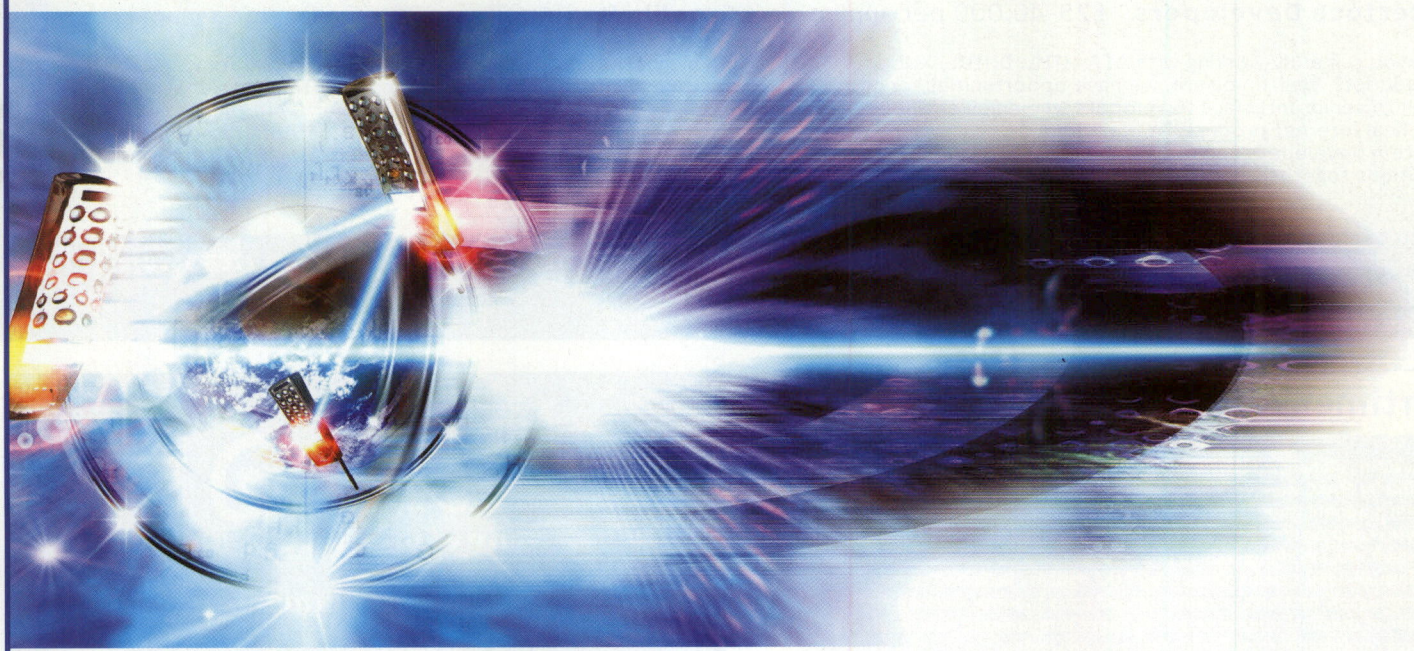

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APEX

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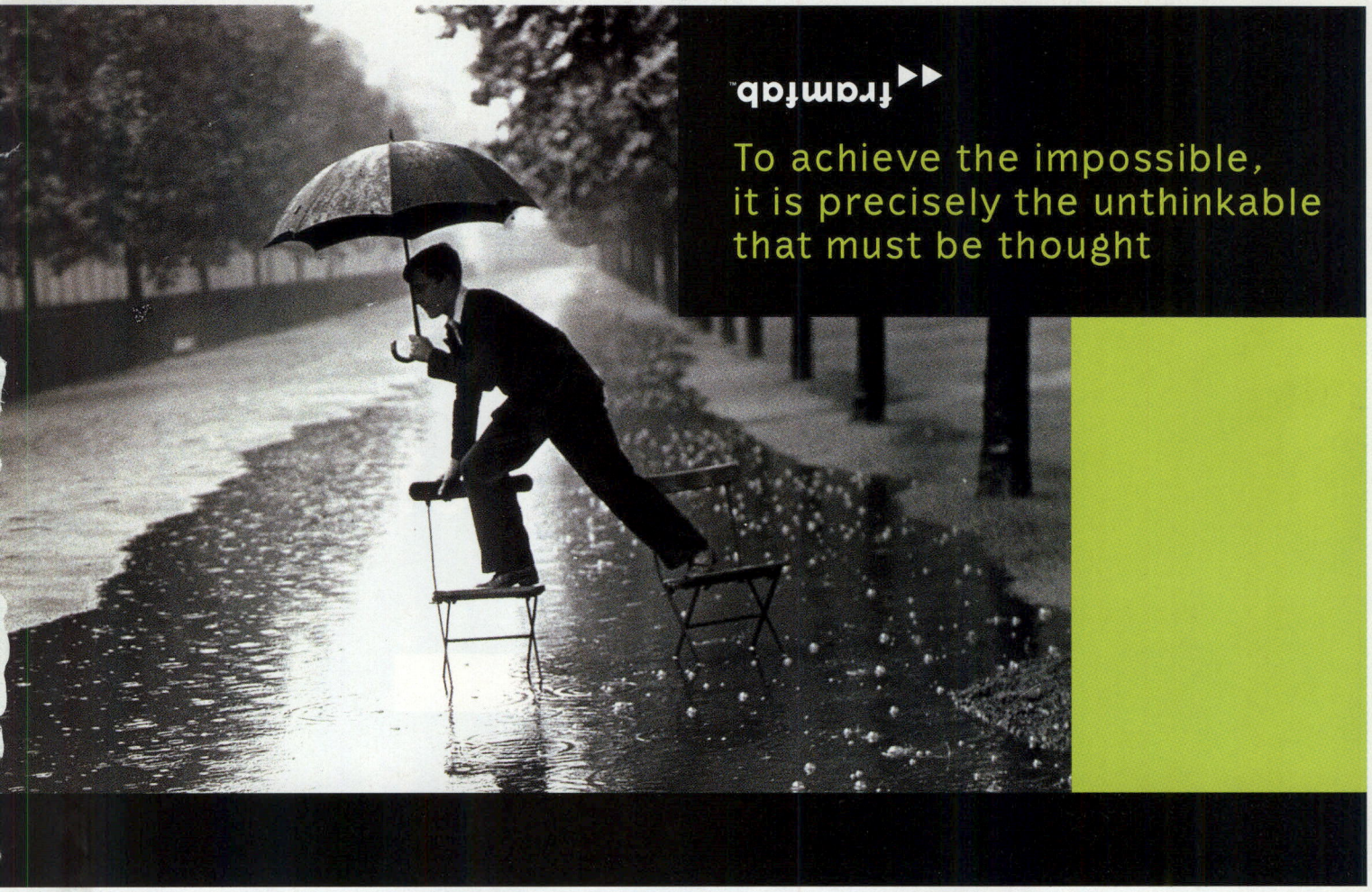

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pivotal top tens

OUR REGULAR LOOK AT WHAT'S HOT ON THE WEB, THE MOST POPULAR SITES, SERVERS AND SEARCH ENGINES, AND OUR SELECTION OF THE MONTH

TOP TEN WEB DEVELOPER SITES

The most popular developer sites on the Web

1. **AOL** (http://webmaster.info.aol.com)
2. **MSDN Online** (http://msdn.microsoft.com)
3. **Sun Microsystems** (www.sun.com/developers)
4. **Adobe** (www.adobe.com)
5. **Symantec Corporation** (www.symantec.com)
6. **Internet.com!** (www.internet.com)
7. **Zap Zone Network** (www.zzn.com)
8. **Network Solutions** (www.networksolutions.com)
9. **Developer.com** (www.developer.com)
10. **IBM developerWorks** (www.ibm.com/developer)

Source: www.100hot.com

CREATE'S TOP TEN

The quirkiest sites around

1. **MONO*crafts** (www.yugop.com)
2. **Sylloge** (www.sylloge.com/5k/entries/43/index.html)
3. **TV Go Home** (www.TVgohome.com)
4. **Soda** (www.soda.co.uk)
5. **Urban Express** (www.urbanexpress.co.uk)
6. **PopEx** (www.popex.com)
7. **Slashdot** (www.slashdot.org)
8. **Suck** (www.suck.com)
9. **View Askew** (www.viewaskew.com)
10. **Sissy Fight** (www.sissyfight.com)

TOP TEN FLASH SITES

Our Flash forum, found in a specific chat room, has selected its favourite ten examples of Websites that have made really outstanding use of *Flash*

1. **ToyStory 2** (www.toystory2.com)
2. **Toyota** (www.isthistoyota.com)
3. **Fashionwhore** (www.fashionwhore.com)
4. **Jeep** (www.jeepunpaved.com)
5. **Coca-Cola** (www.coke.com)
6. **BadBoyOnline** (www.badboyonline.com)
7. **Land Rover** (www.landroverworld.com/product)
8. **Sportspage.com** (www.sportspage.com)
9. **Hoover** (www.hoover.co.uk/vortex/flash)
10. **Cineworld – The Movies** (www.cineworld.co.uk)

TOP TEN WAP SITES

The best wireless sites on the Net, according to our WAP forum, a specific WAP chat group we asked to list its ten favourite WAP sites

1. **Hitchhiker** (http://wap.h2g2.com)
2. **CNN** (http://mobile.cnn.com/WAP1.1/NEWS/main.wml)
3. **UK Entertainment Centre** (www.ents24.com/index.wml)
4. **Aviation Weather** (www.wapmx.com/fly.wml)
5. **The Hotel Catalogue** (http://wap.hotelcatalogue.net)
6. **Wireless Games** (www.wirelessgames.com)
7. **IrelandWAP** (www.irelandwap.com/menu.wml)
8. **Curryhouse.net** (www.curryhouse.net/wap)
9. **Manchester United** (www.wapprofit.com)
10. **123jump.com** (www.123jump.com/wap)

TOP TEN UK SITES

The UK's hottest sites last month

	Site	Unique users
1	**BBC News Online** (www.bbc.co.uk/news)	2,261,428
2	**New Scientist** (www.newscientist.co.uk)	569,945
3	**Jobserve** (www.jobserve.co.uk)	267,164
4	**The Free Zone** (www.thefreezone.co.uk)	192,718
5	**UK Jobs-Jobtrack** (www.jobtrack.co.uk)	141,092
6	**NewsNow** (www.newsnow.co.uk)	140,358
7	**Magazineshop.co.uk** (www.magazineshop.co.uk)	128,934
8	**Cheap Flights** (www.cheapflights.co.uk)	119,262
9	**Accommodation.com** (www.accommodation.co.uk)	102,679
10	**JobMagic.net** (www.jobmagic.net)	101,118

Source: www.top50.co.uk

TOP TEN WEB SERVERS

The most popular servers in April and their share of the market. Repeat hits are ignored by measuring visitors as unique users

	Site	Unique users	%
1	**Apache**	7,870,864	60.01
2	**Microsoft-IIS**	2,739,901	20.91
3	**Netscape Enterprise**	909,645	6.94
4	**Zeus**	245,255	1.87
5	**Rapidsite**	234,98	1.79
6	**thttpd**	208,536	1.59
7	**mod_x-httpd-php3_script**	119,422	0.91
8	**WebSitePro**	94,763	0.72
9	**Stronghold**	81,403	0.62
10	**WebSTAR**	73,734	0.56

Source: www.netcraft.com

TOP TEN US SITES

US sites to receive the most unique hits in April

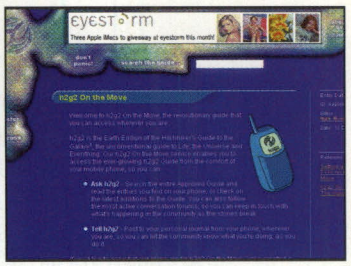
1. **Yahoo** (www.yahoo.com)
2. **AOL** (www.aol.com)
3. **Geocities** (www.geocities.com)
4. **MSN** (www.msn.com)
5. **Lycos** (www.lycos.com)
6. **Passport** (www.passport.com)
7. **Angelfire** (www.angelfirecom)
8. **Netscape** (www.netscape.com)
9. **Microsoft** (www.microsoft.com)
10. **Tripod** (www.tripod.com)

Source: www.hot100.com

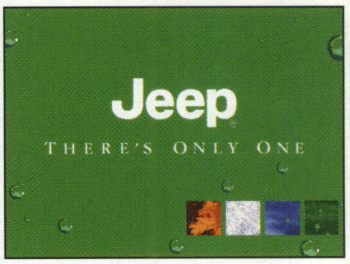
TOP TEN META SEARCH ENGINES

The best multiple searches measured by number of engines and accuracy

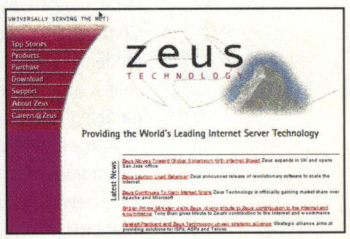
1. **WebInfoSearch** (www.webinfosearch.com)
2. **MESS** (http://searchhoo.hypermart.net/multi.engine.search.htm)
3. **37.com** (www.37.com)
4. **Dogpile** (www.dogpile.com)
5. **Cute Doggy** (www.cutedoggy.com)
6. **Aardvark's Metadog** (www.metadog.com)
7. **Guiding Light** (www.theguiding light.ne)
8. **C4** (www.c4.com)
9. **Better Brains** (www.betterbrain.com)
10. **RedeSearch** (www.redesearch.com)



The Hitchhiker's Guide **makes a successful transformation from TV to WAP.**

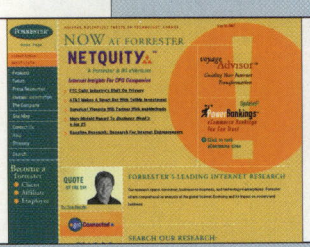


A funky intro secured Jeep a place in our *Flash* forum's list of top ten best sites.



Zeus's impressive server had the fourth highest share of the server market.

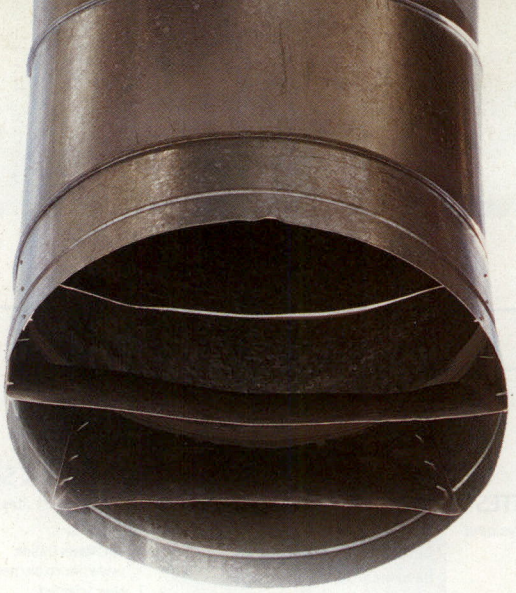
Quality editorial helped to make BBC News Online one of the hottest UK Websites in April.



WAP EXPLOSION

According to a recent report, by 2003, more than 219 million people will be using WAP technology to access the Net.

Forrester Research's report, *Europe's Mobile Internet Opens Up*, found that 90 per cent of e-commerce executives interviewed plan to launch WAP sites within the next few years. Although Forrester estimates that nearly 35 per cent of European mobile Internet providers will initially offer their customers a pay-per-use service, it believes that a competitive market will force them to provide open access to all users by 2002. For the rest of this report and other research, check out **www.forrester.com**



never mind the width

THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEVISED, SAID GIL SCOTT-HERON. WELL, IT SHOULDN'T BE WEBCAST EITHER, IF TODAY'S 'NEW MEDIA' TURNS OUT TO BE JUST A SECOND-RATE IMITATION OF THE OLD

For the last year I have been privileged to be a participant in BT's trial of ADSL – although this is one trial that seems to have outrun both the Guinness and OJ Simpson affairs put together. It has already lasted for more than a year, and at the time of writing, it still has a bit of mileage left in it.

However, let's take BT's announcement of openworld – the new name for the giant's ADSL service – at face value and accept that this high-speed technology will be available to millions of homes by the end of the summer (you can learn more about openworld at www.btopenworld.com). Combine that with the offerings of other ISPs and cable modem companies, and we might assume that come next year, a sizable part of the populace will be diving into the garden of delights promised in the brochures.

And what a garden of delights. Broadband is to the new millennium what 'digital' was to the last decade of the old – the new Holy Grail, the technological cure-all. Hook up to a fat pipe (ahem) and nirvana is yours.

Well, whoah there Neddy. I'm here to tell you it ain't necessarily so.

First, technology rollouts are not the same as provision of a real service. The history of ISDN tells us that. Even if we assume that BT can live up to its promises (ahem!), millions of homes will be outside the reach of these new high-speed services for at least a year. If you've bought into the whole tele-cottaging concept, with views of rolling fields and bankrupt farmers as far as the eye can see, you'll probably never have access.

Second, right now and for the foreseeable future too, there's virtually nothing on the Web that needs 512K speeds. Scour the Net for video content and you'll find lots at 28.8K and 56K sizes, a handful designed for ISDN, and a tiny proportion aimed at 300K access.

Now, 300K may be some way beyond the flickering postage stamps of old, but on my 17-inch monitor it's still smaller than a postcard.

Which brings us to the content provision side of the equation. If you're a Web designer and content provider, the fact that a sizable minority of the population has ADSL or cable modem is not going to impact on your business.

Even as broadband access increases, narrowband access is also on the up. Consider, as just one example, the roar of hype currently surrounding WAP and other technologies for wireless delivery to phones, PDAs and other devices. The real future of Web access is slow and thin.

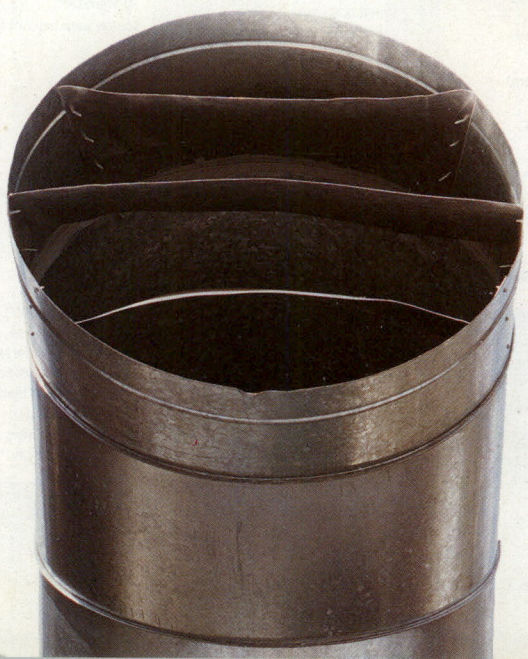
Faster access on the consumer side also does nothing to address the question of server-side technologies. You can max out the most powerful server today by hooking up a couple of thousand viewers to 56K video streams. How much server power do we need to deliver 512K streams? And your budget is how big?

(I might, at this point, also mention that when it comes to full-screen, full-motion streaming video there are two technologies that are both cheap and almost universally available: television and Blockbuster Video.)

If you're a content creator and provider, forget about broadband for the foreseeable future and concentrate instead on exploiting the strengths of today's Internet, where the best work is being done in great design, tight vector graphics, animation and audio. After all, people in their droves across the world are switching off their TVs and firing up their Web browsers. So what's the point in turning the Web into a flickering, stuttering version of television?

This is supposed to be new media. If that's really the case, let's see something new. ■

PETER WORLOCK HAS BEEN A FREELANCE WRITER, EDITOR AND CONSULTANT FOR FIVE YEARS, AND AN IT JOURNALIST FOR NEARLY TWO DECADES.



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